







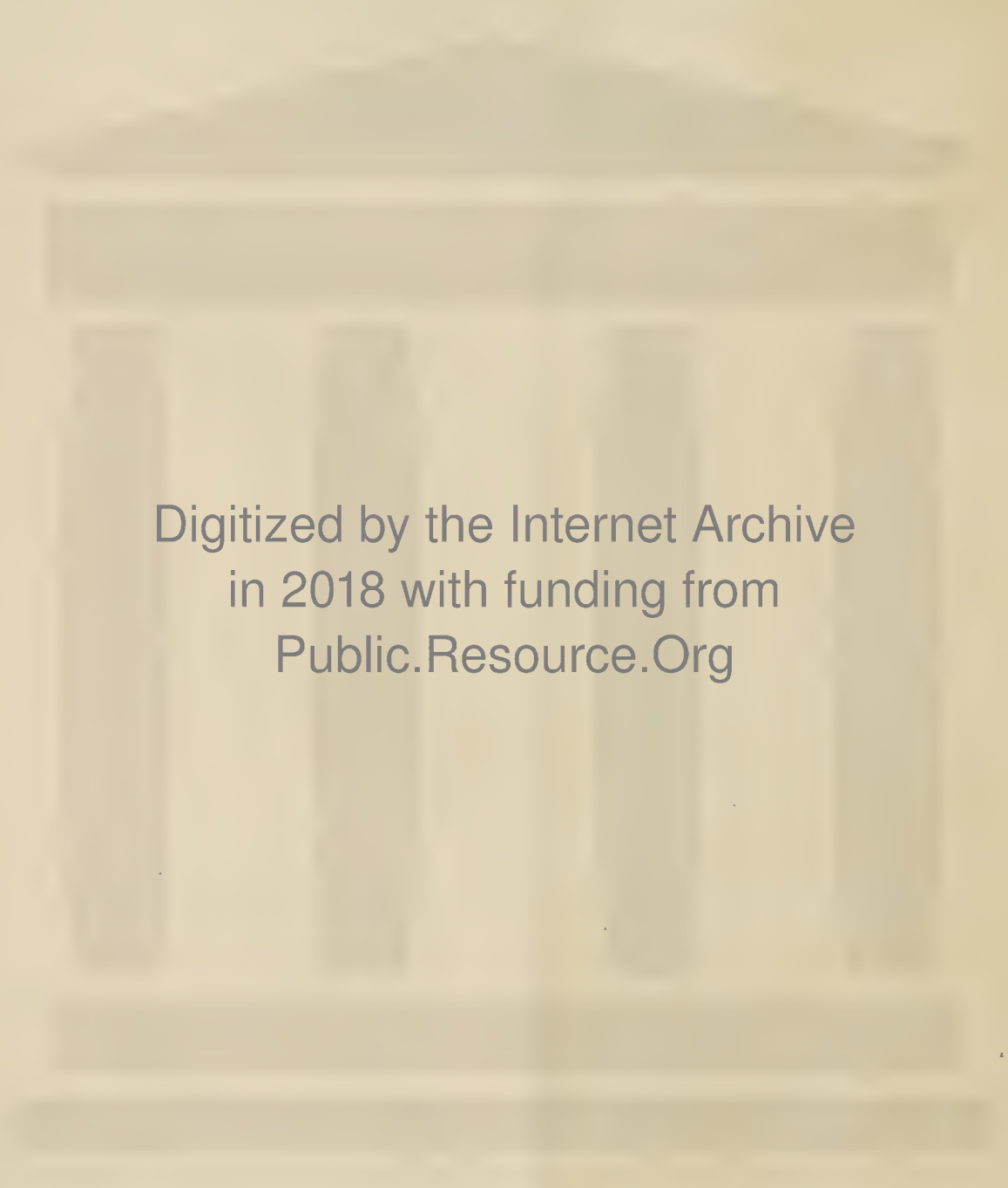








MARCH TO FREEDOM  
IN  
MADRAS PRESIDENCY  
1916-1947



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MARCH TO FREEDOM  
IN  
MADRAS PRESIDENCY  
1916–1947

SAROJA SUNDARARAJAN

*with kind regards*

*[Signature]*  
28/11/90

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GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT  
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## Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to write a 'Foreword' to this book by Dr. (Smt) Saroja Sundararajan appropriately titled as "March to Freedom in Madras Presidency". The contribution of the erstwhile Presidency of Madras to the Freedom Struggle is not adequately known and this book will, therefore, serve a useful purpose in making people aware of the significant efforts made in the Presidency. It will also help students of history particularly those who are interested in research of contemporary history and Independence Movement. While there have been a number of studies carried out by Scholars on various decades of the Freedom Struggle, this book possibly gives a connected account of the Freedom Movement in the South. The book commences from the year 1916 when effort was made to stifle the National Movement and covers the era of Annie Besant, the response to the proposals under Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, Rowlatt Satyagraha, the Non-Co-operation Movement, Diarchy, Anti Brahman wave, the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Act of 1935, the First Congress Ministry under Rajaji, the Anti-war Individual Satyagraha and the Quit India Movement and after.

I am sure that this record of our recent history will be of great interest to many readers among the younger generation in addition to various scholars concerned with the relevant discipline.

The Author has already published two books and several articles. In view of her extensive research on contemporary history particularly of the South, it is appropriate that Dr. (Smt) Saroja Sundararajan should have taken up the present undertaking. She has with objectivity and clarity brought out the great tenacity and faith with which the struggle for Freedom was maintained by earlier generations. The book is, therefore, of interest and value far beyond its academic clientele and I hope it will be widely read and utilised.

—J. VEERA RAGHAVAN





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## Preface

The idea to conduct research on the National Movement in the Madras Presidency was conceived about a decade ago when I was working on my doctoral thesis *S. Satyamurti—A Political Biography*. I came across abundant historical evidence which indicated beyond a shadow of doubt that the political cognomen “Benighted” attributed to the Presidency of Madras was unmerited. I felt I had an obligation both as a citizen of Madras and as a student of Indian Freedom Struggle to rebut this unjust criticism by projecting adequately the significant contribution made by the Presidency to the National Movement.

I do not pretend to be a pioneer in writing about this era of the history of the Presidency. Indian scholars as well as those belonging to the Cambridge School have offered deep historical insights into the politics of the Presidency. But a complete, connected and comprehensive account in English of the freedom struggle which this book embraces, has not yet been given to the readers of history. I therefore venture to hope that the *March to Freedom in Madras Presidency* will be useful to the students of history as well as others who desire to acquaint themselves with the history of the epic struggle of Indian Independence.

The great Tamil scholar patriot M.P. Sivagnanam has written a monumental treatise of two volumes on the role of Tamil Nadu *vis-a-vis* the National Movement. Sri Sivagnanam has not merely written the history of the period; he has actually contributed to the making of it. His illuminating vision of the national war is a first hand account of a participant-observer. His valuable work which is in Tamil will certainly be a source of inspiration for the future generations of Tamil Nadu. My humble desire in presenting this work is that it should reach beyond the boundaries of Tamil Nadu and hopefully the shores of India. My ambition will be fulfilled if those who entertain reservations about the constructive role of the erstwhile composite Madras Presidency in the unique Indian Movement are convinced of its substantial contribution when they read this book.

I commence the story from the year 1916 when the Non-Brahman Movement which proved detrimental to the national cause was launched in the Presidency. The first chapter which provides a historical background for the book traces briefly the political situation of the Presidency from 1799 to 1916. The theme of the book which is the national war in the Madras Presidency may appear to be somewhat paradoxical: for it focusses on the one hand on the politics of the Presidency and on the other the national war. To be more precise, the very nature of the subject has rendered it impossible to insulate the events and the movements in the Presidency from those in the rest of India as both are inextricably intertwined. Nevertheless, a sincere attempt has been made to keep the Presidency constantly in focus.

Focus on the Presidency does not however mean that all the events of the period covered have been exhaustively dealt with. The emphasis in this book has been on movements rather than on personalities. Even leaders of some of the movements have been treated only as leaders and not as personalities however eminent they might have been. For example, Satyamurti has been dealt with here only as a leader who took the National Movement to the masses. His achievements in other realms of public life have been scrupulously excluded from the purview of the book.

Certain non-political events like the Vaikkom Satyagraha against untouchability, to cite but an instance, have also been dealt with. In the first place, such events had definitely a bearing on the current National Movement; secondly, the very same weapons forged for the struggle for political freedom were used in fighting such evils; and thirdly, the leaders of the National Movement lent their support to these extra-political movements.

It may be mentioned in the passing that the old British place names—Tinnevelly for Tirunelveli, Cocanada for Kakinada, Tanjore for Thanjavur, Vizagapatam for Visakhapattinam etc.,—have been retained as they were current then.



## Acknowledgements

My first grateful thanks are due to the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi for the Senior Fellowship awarded to me for three years (1983-86) to work on the title. I am equally obliged to the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, for having kindly sponsored my trip to the United Kingdom to consult the necessary records and private papers at the India Office Library and Records, London, in September–October 1986. The Education Department of the Government of Pondicherry deserves special mention for enabling me to avail of the Fellowship and to pursue my post-doctoral research.

I express my profound sense of gratitude to the late Sri M. Bhaktavatsalam, Veteran Congress leader and ex-Chief Minister of Madras who graciously granted me two interviews at his residence in Madras in May 1984. The discussions we had, proved very valuable. He was pleased to read through large portions of Chapters Two and Thirteen. My thanks are also due to the late Raja Sir Muthiah Chetty, ex-Minister of the Justice Party who gave me an interview about a week prior to his demise in May 1984.

I am deeply indebted to the India Office Library & Records, London; National Archives of India, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and Sapru House Library, New Delhi; *The Hindu*, *the Madras Mail*, the Tamil Nadu Archives and the Connemara Public Library, Madras for the uniform courtesy extended to me in throwing open the relevant records in their possession. I am particularly grateful to *The Hindu*, the Theosophical Society, the Krishnaswamy Associates, the C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar Foundation and Sri A.R. Damodaran who generously provided me with the photographs printed in the book.

I record my deep sense of gratitude to Sri J. Veeraraghavan, Secretary, Human Resources Development, Government of India who has graciously given me a Foreword for the book.

I am also greatly beholden to the following persons who are largely responsible for the successful completion of the work: Dr. D. Raja Ganesan, Department of Education, University of Madras who went through most of the chapters at my request



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My heartfelt thanks are due to my Librarian Mrs. S.K. Prema who took pains to prepare the Index.

My special thanks go to Sri Saphal Jhunjunwala, Manager, Sri G.S.A. Selvaraj, Mrs. & Mr. R. Sethuraman and the entire staff of the All India Press for their impressive photosetting and printing of the book which they completed in an impossibly short time of three months.

Pondicherry  
Dt. 31.12.1988

SAROJA SUNDARARAJAN

## CHAPTER ONE

# Benighted Madras—Fact or Fiction?

### *The Background:*

The Indian National Movement is an epic story. It is also an intense and unique historical drama that spans about half a century. The theme of the drama is liberation from colonialism through a non-violent struggle by which India was gradually released and given her rightful place in the comity of nations. India did not have to wage a similar war of liberation earlier in her political history.

Foreign invasions invariably constitute a challenge to any civilization. Even the hoary Indian civilization has had to encounter many such challenges, the recent major ones being the Mughal invasion and the advent of the British. Both have left their indelible marks in Indian history. The Mughal invaders were virtually assimilated both ethnically and culturally. The graves of the Mughal kings that litter Delhi, the capital of contemporary India, bear witness to their having died as Indians. Of course, some of the Muslim invaders who gained political power converted sizeable sections of the Hindu population. Nevertheless, the descendants of these converts remained Indians.

But the story of the British adventurers is different. They came to trade but stumbled on an Empire. Unlike their Muslim predecessors, the British insulated themselves from the Indian population with an imperial arrogance. Though they scrupulously followed an official policy of secularism they might have also tacitly connived at the proselytisation efforts of evangelical missionaries. Thus there was no reciprocal assimilation between the Indians and the British either at the cultural or at the ethnic level. The Muslims came, saw, conquered and died in India. The British came, saw, conquered and departed to Britain. Nevertheless, the British influence on India is more distinct and enduring. Whereas the Indian response to the Mughal challenge was never unified into a national, that is, pan-Indian movement, the British advent made for a political and national unification.



Even during the turbulent period of Muslim invasion the Southern part of India had enjoyed a relatively tranquil history until the advent of the British. This tranquillity enabled her to cultivate art and culture. As the whole country was sliding into decadence, the south was nostalgically looking back to the days of its ancient glory. This mood is expressed by Kipling with an unmerited sarcasm as “a withered beldame dreaming of ancient fame”.

The British advent in India began in the south. The city of Madras has been rightly described by some Englishmen as the “birthplace of British India”. With the exception of an insignificant piece of ground at Armagon (Krishna District), Madras was the first territorial acquisition which the British obtained in 1639. This place had become a power in the land twenty years before Bombay was transferred to England as a Queen’s dower, and fifty years before Calcutta was founded or Karachi thought of. Madras was, therefore, the firstling of the three Presidencies initially established by the British in India and her Governor ranked only next to the Viceroy. By the beginning of the nineteenth century Fort Saint George the first of the agencies of the East India Company to be made into a Presidency, comprised the whole of the present Tamil Nadu, part of Orissa, a large portion of Andhra Pradesh and parts of Kerala and Karnataka\*. Madras was the first settlement of British India and also the first centre to revolt against the British quest for political power. This geo-political factor, this first scene had unfortunately been blacked out in the drama of Indian freedom struggle. And the geographical region called the “Madras Presidency” earned the sobriquet of a “benighted” province. “Benighted” according to Webster means “to surround with ignorance”, “in moral darkness” etc. In this sense, Madras was not benighted at all.

It is not precisely known who imputed this epithet to the Presidency, when, why and with what connotations. The sobriquet

\* The Northern Circars — Ganjam, Vizagapatam, Godawari (acquired from the Nizam in 1766), Krishna (from the Nizam in 1759 and 1768), and Palnad (from the Nawab of Carnatic in 1801); Nellore District (from the Nawab of Carnatic in 1801); Ceded Districts — Bellary and Cuddappah (from the Nizam in 1800); Kurnool (from the Nawab of Kurnool in 1838); Chingleput (in 1765 and 1801); Trichinopoly (1792); Tinnevely (1792-1801); Salem (from Tipu Sultan in 1792); Malabar (from Tipu Sultan in 1792); and South Canara (from Tipu Sultan in 1799). (S. Srinivasaraghaviengar, Inspector General of Registration, Madras. *Memoir — on the Progress of the Madras Presidency during the last forty years of British administration* (1893).



had been used by the British bureaucrats in the Bombay and Calcutta Presidencies. From the time Calcutta officially became the capital of British India, the other Presidencies, especially Madras, naturally lost their colonial importance. This was perhaps one reason why the British bureaucrats posted in Calcutta and controlling the entire colonial territory in India described Madras as “benighted”.<sup>1</sup> Madras was also relatively backward in mercantile affairs. Certainly the Madras port did not have as fertile a mercantile hinterland as Bombay had on the West Coast or Calcutta commanded on the East.

This unfortunate sobriquet “benighted” was tagged unreflectively on to the Madras Presidency by the northern pioneers in the nationalist movement.\* The label “benighted” was thus attributed to Madras with a political connotation too.<sup>2</sup> But there was little justification for such a taunt. The Indian resistance to British colonial enterprise in India had been spontaneous, sporadic, intermittent and conditioned by vicissitudes of parochial political events. It was not uniform either in its intensity or in its operation. Different regions of the British Indian territory evinced different levels of resistance and political awakening and activity at different periods, thanks to the differences in geo-political, intellectual and socio-political factors. The pockets of resistance that cropped up throughout the length and breadth of the British Indian territory were isolated and unco-ordinated until the beginning of this century. The people of this Presidency meekly put up with the atrocities and indignities to which they were subjected by British Governors, bureaucrats and Indian officials who were their henchmen. But people in other Provinces too had by and large put up with them during this period of Indian history. Perhaps the people of the

\* Surendranath Banerjee, piqued by the attitude of some Tamils towards his campaign against the reduction of age limit for the Indian Civil Service Examination from 21 to 19, called the Presidency the most “benighted” of all the Provinces in India. But Banerjee had to revise his stand almost immediately. The third Indian National Congress of 1887, which met for the first time at Madras showed how enlightened the Presidency was. When Amid Ali representing the United Provinces alluded to the uncharitable remark of Banerjee in the latter’s presence while addressing the Congress, Banerjee magnanimously withdrew his remark. He also agreed that the Presidency was the “torchbearer” for other Provinces in the liberation movement. As a Tamil savant and freedom fighter put it “Thousand Lights” (a suburb in Madras where the Congress session was held) became necessary to dispel Banerjee’s “illusion”. (M.P. Sivagnanam, *Vidudalaipporil Tamizhagam*, Vol: I, Poongodi Patipagam, (1983) pp: 127 & 28).

Madras Presidency had been more meek, mild and moderate compared to, say, those of the Punjab, Bengal and Bombay. To that extent, one has to concede that the National Movement was more subdued in Madras than elsewhere. However, this mildness and moderation cannot belie the fact that the seeds of the National Movement first sprouted on the soil of the South.

The Indian resistance to the advent of the British as a political power on the soil of India ante-dates the Indian mutiny (1857) which broke out in the north, by more than half a century: Veerapandiya Kattabomman, *Poligar*\* of Panchalankurichi (in Tinnevely), was the first Indian hero to reject the British claims of suzerainty in India, refuse to pay tribute to them, defy their injunctions, confront them on the battle-field and succumb to their sentence of death. He was hanged on 17 October 1799 at the age of thirty nine.<sup>3</sup> He was the first martyr in the as yet amorphous form of Indian nationalism. Thus the very first resistance to the British at the political level which eventually transformed itself into a definite movement for Indian independence has had its major origins in the Madras Presidency. And Kattabomman a mere chieftain was the first Indian to perceive the anomaly of an alien government imposing its rule on the sons of the soil. It is an irony of history that nearly a century later, the whole of India meekly accepted the arrogance of the British that they were born to rule and that they would not submit themselves to the jurisdiction of competent Indian Judges. \*\*

\* A corruption of the Tamil name *Palayakkaran*, meaning holder of an armed camp.

\*\* A minority unofficial English element in India obstructed the passage of the "Ilbert Bill" in 1883 which involved a "fundamental principle of justice and fair play to the children of soil". It was a modest proposal of Ripon's Government seeking to establish racial equality. But the very idea of conferring on a few experienced Indian judges criminal jurisdiction over resident Europeans was anathema to the "earthly Gods" in the India of 1883. The cherished conviction that "he belongs to a race whom God has destined to govern and subdue" was shared by every Englishman in India, said W.S. Seton Kerr, Foreign Secretary to the Government of India. (C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India, Reply to Mother India*, P.90). Had India as a whole been less moderate and more aggressive then, it would doubtless have obstructed the triumph of a handful of Europeans in India.



*Morning Stars of Indian Nationalism:*

The resistance to British supremacy manifested again in the Presidency at the political as well as social and religious levels from 1844 onwards. Of course this resistance was fitful. It was also moderate. Nevertheless, it was there. The *Crescent*, the Madras Native Association, *The Hindu* and the Madras Mahajana Sabha played a seminal role in rousing public consciousness among the commercial and professional elite of the Presidency even in the nineteenth century. Their founders were the pioneers of nationalism in South India. The *Crescent* was a journal founded in 1844 by the Hindu leader Gazulu Lakshminarasu Chetty, the earliest public agitator in the Presidency. Its declared intention was to defend traditional Hindu values against what was considered to be alien religious thought. From his childhood Gazulu was deeply interested in the political gestures of the day. Though the son of a wealthy businessman, his interest lay in achieving the political emancipation of his countrymen. He liberally spent his father's fortune in waging political campaigns, chiefly to counteract the Christian missionary agitation against the Government policy of religious neutrality. He engaged Harley, an Englishman sympathetic to the Indian cause, as its editor. The leaders of the journal were noted for their dignity, force of argument and logic. The popularity of the journal increased with the formation of the Madras Native Association in 1852 by a group of western educated Hindu youths under the captaincy of Gazulu. The chief object of this Association was to petition British Government bringing to its notice "the grievances and wants of the inhabitants of the Presidency". To a vast majority of the Hindus of those days, the executive authorities in Madras constituted the entire ruling body. They had no knowledge of the Board of Control — the political ancestor of the India Council — which was the controlling authority in England and to whom they could represent their grievances through petitions and memorials. Through its petitions the Madras Native Association demanded of the British the same sort of freedom which their own *Magna Carta* had given them. In those days, the Government did not prohibit public servants from participating in political discussions. The Association was, therefore, composed of both officials and non-officials — a factor which proved highly beneficial to the association. Its leadership consisted not only of the urban Hindu commercial class but

also other interests. Two of the earliest graduates of the then Madras High School (progenitor of the Presidency College) — V. Sata-gopacharlu and V. Ramanujachari also served on it.<sup>4</sup>

The very first act of the Association under Gazulu's leadership was waging a war against European missionaries who were engaged in a vigorous proselytisation of the Hindus who were given to sending their children to the missionary institutions. About a decade earlier, in 1841, three Hindu students were converted to Christianity. This conversion caused a great panic among the Hindu community. This was also directly responsible for the founding of the Pachaiyappa's School in 1842 with a view to providing education to the students withdrawn from missionary institutions. By the 1850s the missionaries had almost set the stage for introducing the Bible as a text book in Government Schools. About this time, in 1852, Danbay Seymour, Member of British Parliament, was sojourning in Madras as the guest of Gazulu. The latter availed himself of this favourable opportunity to bring to the knowledge of his guest the high-handedness of the local authorities in curtailing the civil and religious rights of the Hindu community and also the other serious defects in the then British administration. Accompanying the British dignitary on his tour to Kumbakonam, Cuddalore, Coimbatore and other places, Gazulu enabled Seymour to learn by personal observation the prohibitive rates at which the land-holder was assessed and other malpractices indulged in by the British officers.

Agitation over the *Lex Loci*\* was another and more important case in point. The Indian Law Commission drafted a code of law — the Lex Loci Draft Act — in which three clauses\*\* which had no relevance whatsoever to the measure were inserted. It was done deliberately to neutralise those sections of the Hindu and Muslim Laws which inflicted forfeiture of rights to ancestral property upon anyone renouncing these religions. This Draft Act confirmed the worst fears of the Madras Native Association that the Government was behind the missionaries' activities in subverting Hinduism.

\* The law of the land.

\*\* Clauses 10, 11 and 12 which dealt with the problems of the Native converts. By these, such sections of the Hindu or Mohammadan law as inflicted forfeiture of rights and property upon any party renouncing his or her religion would cease to be enforced. (M.P. Jain, *Outlines of Indian Legal History*, Fourth Edition, N.M. Tripathi Pvt. Ltd. 1981 p.417).



Thanks to the initiative and energy of Gazulu, meetings were organised to protest against this Act. A memorial was sent to the Government of India charging them with a "breach of faith". Stating that the three "obnoxious" clauses were "a palpable invasion of their ancient rights and a direct attack upon their religion and a peremptory subversion of their ancestral and inalienable law", the memorialists demanded their expunction. Gazulu was perhaps the first Indian to start as early as the mid-nineteenth century, western methods of political agitation. In the words of a contemporary historian: "this was the first known Hindu gathering in Madras which had all the trappings of a modern protest meeting; the permission of the Sheriff of Madras was secured; a Chairman was elected to conduct the meeting; resolutions were passed; and the memorial was approved and signed for submission to the Government".<sup>5</sup> The issue had stirred strong Hindu emotions throughout the country. The Government was forced to delete the three controversial clauses from the Draft Act. However, five years later, it enacted them separately under the rubric of "Caste Disabilities Removal Act, 1850". There was a fresh volley of protest from the Hindus through the *Crescent* which accused the Government of "shameful duplicity, profound stupidity and insulting tyranny".<sup>6</sup>

The Madras Native Association was largely responsible for the appointment of the Torture Commission by the British Government. It organised an agitation against torture employed in many parts of the Presidency by the revenue officials in exacting the revenue from ryots and by the police in extorting confessions from criminals. Danbay Seymour, who had obtained a first-hand knowledge of the medieval practice of torture used in the mofussil areas of the Presidency during his visit in early 1852, asserted in the House of Commons in July of the same year that torture was inflicted on the people not only in the investigation of criminal cases under enquiry but also in the collection of revenue. Two years later in September 1854, a Torture Commission was appointed to investigate the alleged cases of torture and corruption. The Commission found most of the allegations well-founded. It brought to light all kinds of abuses particularly those indulged in by the police of Madras which had become "the bane and pest of society, the terror of the community and the origin of half the misery and discontent that exists among the subjects of government".<sup>7</sup>

The Commission suggested steps for the removal of the abuses.

The most noteworthy feature of its report was its advocacy of utilising the services of the Indians.<sup>8</sup>

Of the many petitions sent by the Madras Native Association, those of 1853 and 1855 were the most prominent. In the first, the Association demanded the establishment of a Legislative Council on the precedent of the Council of Ceylon, Cape of Good Hope and New Zealand so that there would be Indian representation in the Government.<sup>9</sup> The Indian Councils Act of 1861 provided for the establishment of Legislative Councils. In the second petition it complained bitterly of the misrule and oppression of the Company's Government and demanded direct Government by the Crown. The Proclamation of Queen Victoria in 1858 provided for these. The public in Madras never lost sight of their main demand for responsible Government and pressed for it whenever an opportunity presented itself. Even in their farewell address presented in 1859 to Trevelyan, the most popular Governor since Munro, they reiterated their demand for responsible Government. In reply the Governor exhorted them to qualify themselves for representative institutions by cultivating the "literature of England which is instinct with the spirit of self-government".<sup>10</sup>

The Madras Native Association deliberated on all public questions and its inestimable document on local self-government is pronounced to be an enduring monument of its labour. It contributed to the fostering of local self-government institutions by the Government through the Towns Improvement Act of 1884, the District Municipalities Act of 1884 and the Local Boards Acts of 1871 and 1884. The municipalities and local boards created by these Acts had elected members also besides the official ones. These bodies were entrusted with the management of local affairs such as sanitation, roads, schools etc.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately they did *not* pave the way to responsible government!

The Madras Hindu Debating Society was founded by M. Venkatarayulu Naidu in 1852. Its main aim was to promote the mental and moral development of its constituents. Though the word "Hindu" was there, its members belonged to all creeds and races. The Society also dabbled in politics. A tone of rivalry seemed to have characterised its attitude to the Madras Native Association. It became defunct after Naidu's death in 1863.<sup>12</sup>

The next major milestone in the annals of the National Movement in the Madras Presidency was the founding of *The Hindu*



in 1878. The paper was launched by six adventurous young men\* with a paltry borrowed capital of a rupee and three quarters. G. Subrahmania Iyer headed this team of youth. Its first issue appeared on 20 September 1878 under the auspices of the Triplicane Literary Society which was founded in 1868 by a Muslim Mir Ibrahim Ali.

The very birth cry of this paper, which enjoys international reputation to-day, was a vibrant nationalism. The first issue commended the appointment of T. Muthuswamy Iyer as a Judge of the Madras High Court and joined issue with the Anglo-Indian Press which did not take kindly to the appointment of an Indian as a High Court Judge.

With *The Hindu* began a new era in the political life of the Madras Presidency. It was the sole representative of public opinion in the Presidency during its early days. Its reputation rose meteorically. As early as 1882 — that is, within four years of its birth — it became a reliable barometer for public opinion in the Presidency. Whenever Viceroy Ripon wanted to ascertain public opinion on any important measure, he would say: “Take *The Hindu* and see what it says”.<sup>13</sup> First founded as a weekly, *The Hindu* sought to reflect public opinion on to its alien rulers. Soon the paper discovered that it had a more vital role to play than merely *reflecting* public opinion. The paper took the initiative in *shaping* public opinion in the direction of an ultimate demand for national liberation. The paper became a tri-weekly in 1883 and a daily within six years thereafter. “It was the first English daily newspaper owned and edited solely by Indians”.<sup>14</sup> *The Hindu* was largely responsible for educating the voters, canalising public opinion and initiating debates on vital public questions. It steadily nurtured and protected nationalism from the day of its humble origins unto the time of its growth into full stature when it became capable of challenging and dislodging the colonial power. It came to a head-on collision with the Madras administration almost from the date of its birth. It waged a grim and relentless battle to secure justice for the people against a tyrannical administration whose fountain-head was the Governor.

*The Hindu* was also instrumental in bringing back to life the

\* G. Subrahmania Iyer, M. Veeraraghavachari, T.T. Rangachari, P.V. Rangachari, D. Kesava Rao Pant and Subba Rau Pantulu. The first two who became its sole proprietors were school masters. The other four were doing law.

Madras Native Association under the care of V.Bhashyam Iyengar. The revived Association began its work in right earnest: its main aim was to gain recognition for the claims of the sons of the soil to a proper share in the administration of the country. But it was unable to survive the harsh policies of Governor Grant Duff. Government servants who took part in the deliberations of the Association were looked upon with suspicion by the administration. The enthusiasm of the non-official members also slackened thanks to this attitude of the administration. Thus the revived Madras Native Association was short-lived. *The Hindu* rightly observed that the Association had done its work and spent itself.

A periodical in Tamil, *Swadesamitran* espousing the cause of Indian nationalism appeared on the scene in 1882 within four years of the founding of *The Hindu*. It was founded by G. Subrahmanya Iyer, who was Editor of *The Hindu*. After leaving *The Hindu* in 1898 he converted this Tamil weekly into a daily and vigorously sponsored nationalist views. The great patriot Subrahmanya Bharati, who attained instant popularity owing to his great poetic talents, was for some time attached to this paper. However, when the rebel in him dragged him into the vortex of extremist politics, Bharathi left the *Swadesamitran* to join *India*, a new Tamil weekly. His fiery articles espousing the cause of India were read widely. He continued to edit the *India* from Pondicherry during his exile there. Years later, when he came under the spell of Mahatma Gandhi he was welcomed back to *Swadesamitran*.

After the extinction of the Madras Native Association, Madras was again bereft of an organisation to ventilate public grievances. However, there was a dire necessity for concerted action on the issues of public interest and importance. This necessity brought together Veeraraghavachari, Anandacharlu, Rangaiah Naidu and a few other patriots. They constituted themselves into the Madras Mahajana Sabha on 16 May 1884 under the Presidency of Rangaiah Naidu. Its moving spirit was, however, Anandacharlu, its Secretary. Thanks to Charlu's tireless efforts the Sabha became the premier nationalist organisation in the city with a number of associations in the mofussil centres affiliated to it within six months of its foundation. It drew its support from the English educated Hindu elite and, to a limited extent, from their counterparts within the Muslim population of the city. At the very first conference of the Sabha held in December of the year Anandacharlu explained its aims and objects as follows: "This Sabha expects to bring to



focus nearly all the non-official intelligence now spreading without any visible proof of cohesion all over the Presidency. This, however, is not an object which is striven after for its own sake. It is pursued as a means to an end, that end being to promote mutual understanding among the people separated by space to ascertain what consensus of opinion there is among them on questions of vital interest to us and, from time to time, submit for the consideration of Government the views and suggestions such a consensus of opinion may warrant. One of the necessary conditions to achieve this object is a free and frequent interchange of thought and one of the means for the attainment is to hold periodical conferences".<sup>15</sup>

Anandacharlu, the man who built up the Madras Mahajana Sabha, was a creative writer, eminent advocate and a versatile personality. Earlier he had been President of the Triplicane Literary Society and Secretary of the Madras Native Association. He was active in public life and consistently upheld the cause of the nation on many occasions: as a representative of the Sabha he pleaded before the Public Service Commission, which visited Madras in 1884, for the conduct of simultaneous Civil Service examinations both in England and in India. Though the British Parliament also passed a resolution in 1890 in favour of this, the Government of India did not execute it. When the latter held an inferior type of examination for the Indian candidates, Anandacharlu vehemently protested against the new injustice through his speeches and writings. He also consistently fought for the abolition of the India Council in London which was too far away to understand the feelings of Indians and to serve any useful purpose. Delivering his Presidential address to the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1891 he described the India Council as "the oligarchy of fossilised Indian administrators who were superannuated for services in India". He was the first South Indian to be made President of the Indian National Congress. Having been the President he later grew in stature to become a Proposer of Presidents to that prestigious body. And no Congress was held without his "weighty presence". He was one of the ten Congress leaders who dominated the Congress both as President and Secretary.<sup>16</sup>

Anandacharlu served as a member of the Imperial Legislative Council for eight years from 1895. He pleaded repeatedly for reduction of taxes in general and of salt tax and land revenue assessment in particular. He insisted on reducing the civil expenditure so as to encourage agriculture and indigenous industries and to

extend relief to the poor. He criticised most severely the military expenditure at all budget sessions. No one fought with greater vigour in this Council than Anandacharlu.

What endeared Anandacharlu most to the public as a fearless champion of their cause was his opposition to Government's move to amend the Indian Penal Code in 1897 towards curbing the speeches and activities of the Nationalists. The Postal Act was so amended by the Government as to empower the postal authorities to stop letters which they considered objectionable from reaching the addressees. Section 108 was introduced in the Criminal Procedure Code to empower the Magistrate to punish offenders. Anandacharlu and the Maharaja of Dharbanga were appointed members of the Special Committee to go into the question of amending the Indian Penal Code. When the Committee submitted its proposal both the Indian members who differed from the rest submitted their views separately. They stated plainly that the amendments if passed in their existing form would only engender an eternal feeling of fear and hatred in the minds of the public about the Government as being irresponsible. An irate Secretary of State, George Hamilton, remarked in the House of Commons that the critics of the Government who "never enjoyed either the freedom of speech or of action formerly, now make exaggerated claims to their rights and liberties as British subjects. Sir Anandacharlu of the Imperial Legislative Council is one among them".<sup>17</sup> Anandacharlu had also some British friends of high standing. Viceroy Elgin and Curzon held him in high esteem.

Having remained for about two decades "a shining light of the South Indian political firmament", Anandacharlu, retired in 1902. When the difference between the Extremists and Moderates became acute in the Congress in 1907, the moderate leader Rash Behari Ghosh sought his help. While in the midst of helping the national body forge together, Anandacharlu passed away on 28 November 1907.

When A.O. Hume, a philanthropic Scotchman and a great friend of Indian Nationalists, arrived in Madras in 1885 to assess for himself the level of national awakening in the Presidency, he found it bubbling with political life. He speaks of a band of patriotic and dedicated men chief amongst whom were G. Subrahmania Iyer, M. Veeraraghavachari, S. Subrahmania Iyer, P. Rangaiah Naidu, R. Balaji Rao, C. Vijayaraghavachari, P. Anandacharlu and Salem Ramaswamy Mudaliar.<sup>18</sup> During this period, political



activities in this Presidency were paradoxically catalysed at once by the liberal policies of Viceroy Ripon and the reactionary regime of Governor Grant Duff. Whereas the Viceroy's liberal policies directly encouraged political activism, Duff's reactionary attitude indirectly provoked the same. In other words, political activity in the Presidency did not thrive merely on a benevolent, paternalising viceregal policies but also arose in defiant protest against reactionary repression.

It was in Madras that the idea of setting up a national political body originated. Viceroy Dufferin had desired that Indians must have a national forum where political issues could be debated and public opinion crystallised. This idea was seriously pursued by veterans like Anandacharlu, G. Subrahmania Iyer and Rangaiah Naidu. In December 1884 when the annual Theosophical Convention met at Madras, seventeen Indian stalwarts\* of national stature among its delegates had a conclave at the house of the great social reformer Raghunatha Rao and mooted the subject of a national forum. According to some, the idea of setting up a national body was mooted at an informal gathering among those assembled at Bombay to bid farewell to Viceroy Ripon in October 1884. Even if that was so, there was every possibility of the idea being seriously followed up at the Madras meeting two months later in December 1884 when it took a concrete shape. The Indian National Congress was formally born on 28 December 1885 in the hall of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College in Bombay, W.C. Bonnerjee presiding.

The Madras contingent to this first Congress was headed by G. Subrahmania Iyer, the Editor of *The Hindu*, who had the honour of moving the first resolution. The motion was that the promised enquiry into the working of the Indian administration should be by a Royal Commission with adequate representation of Indians thereon. He said "Parliament took control in theory but abandoned it in fact — except where English Party interests were concerned — and the Indian Council took the place of the defunct Company, but ruled without enquiry".<sup>19</sup> He relentlessly followed up this recommendation for twelve years through his brilliant editorials in *The*

\* G. Subrahmania Iyer, P. Rangaiah Naidu and P. Anandacharlu of Madras; Narendranath Sen, Surendranath Banerjee, M. Ghosh and Chandra Mitter of Bengal; V.N. Mandlik, K.T. Telang and Dadabhai Naoroji of Bombay; C. Vijayaranga Mudaliar and Pandurang Gopal of Poona; Sardar Dayal Singh of the Punjab; Haris Chandra of Allahabad; Kaliprasad and Pandit Lakshminarayan of North West Province; and Sri Ram of Oudh.



*Hindu*. In January 1897 he wrote that nothing short of a Royal Commission could mend or end the whole system of administration which was "culpable, guilty, incapable and selfish". The recommendation was given effect to in the same year.

In March 1897, Subrahmania Iyer was invited to London to give evidence before the Royal Commission on Indian Expenditure presided over by Welby. He deposed before the Commission in May 1897. He acquitted himself exceedingly well in representing the Indian view on the financial administration of India. His twin objections to the prevailing mode of financial administration were the drain on India's resources on account of heavy borrowing for constructing railways and the devastating effect of the latter on indigenous industry which had been the livelihood of millions for centuries. He laid special emphasis on the weaving trade which had become well nigh extinct thanks to the invasion of English Textiles. He said "Every machine-made article imported from Europe and carried into the Indian village with the help of railways, drives a nail in the coffin of native industry and in this manner the railways have to answer for a good deal of the poverty which makes the lot of the Indian poor so miserable".<sup>20</sup>

English educated public in Madras was a force to reckon with even in 1885. During this year, the Madras Government proposed certain measures which provoked a powerful protest in the Presidency. The Governor and his Executive Council wanted to make Ootacamund the permanent capital city of the Province and shift all government offices to that place. Secondly, they also planned to make it the permanent military headquarters. Thirdly, they wanted to transfer the military audit department to Bangalore. The public in the Presidency protested against these measures: apart from the unnecessary extra expenditure they involved, such measures would sever public contact with the Government. A large number of persons met outside the Pachaiyappa's hall in Madras and appointed a Committee to draft a memorandum to the Government. Ananda-charlu was one of the members on the Committee. Seeing the magnitude of the opposition, the Government gave up its plan.<sup>21</sup>

The enlightened public in the Presidency did not also hesitate to condemn the extravagant pomp and show during the visit of Viceroy Elgin in December 1895. The nationalist press voiced its concern over the avoidable wastage of expenditure at a time when people were in dire need of more food, more schools, more drains, more water, less price for essential commodities like salt and a

smoother settlement of disputes. If the Viceroy had helped the people in any of these directions, “they will themselves arrange for a show in His Excellency’s behalf. If not, let not insult be added to injury and let no senseless pageantry mark Lord Elgin’s tour. Hyderabad will spend lakhs and Mysore thousands and the people in British India may be satisfied with the waste in native states”, wrote *The Hindu*.<sup>22</sup> A bold statement that attests to an awakened nationalist spirit.

The Madras Mahajana Sabha which first decided to present the Viceroy an address subsequently withdrew it. The Viceroy to whom an advance copy of it was sent as per norms directed the Sabha to delete three paragraphs relating to essential public issues such as reduction in military expenditure from the address. The Sabha, which insisted on having the whole hog of it or none, declined to present the address and thus honour Viceroy Elgin. The *Madras Mail* wrote a scathing editorial describing the Sabha as a pigmy which dared to defy the giant! The Sabha sent a copy of the correspondence to this Anglo-Indian paper for publication, whereupon it advised the “disloyal curs of the Madras Mahajana Sabha”, to seek favour at the hands of the “seditious *Hindu* and the fire brand *Madras Standard*”. The paper even said that the Sabha had cut its nose to spite its face!<sup>23</sup>

Such violent and boisterous attacks and pejorative language employed by pro-Governmental agencies were born out of a real fear that the loyalty of the Presidency to the British Government could no longer be taken for granted.

The literary contributions of G.A. Natesan, editor of the renowned *Indian Review*, shedding light on the growth of public opinion of the period also deserve a brief note here. His first regular publication was the *Indian Politics* which appeared in 1898 when he was just 25. Adorned with an introduction by W.C. Bonnerjee, one of the founders and the first President of the Indian National Congress, this work aimed at educating public opinion in the country and at rallying “British democracy to the cause of Indian freedom”. The various publications issued from the house of Natesan in the form of political biographies, speeches and writings served as “an eye-opener to the middle-aged and an inspiration to the young”.<sup>24</sup> Besides making such literary contributions Natesan played a significant role at all levels of political life in the Presidency.

In the annals of the Indian National Movement the period upto 1905 could be characterised as mild and moderate. An all-



pervading passion of nationalism was not yet evident. It was the modesty and moderation of India as a whole that was responsible for the peoples' representatives not enjoying anything like constitutional power in their own land even after four decades of their entry into the Legislative Councils. In 1861 the seed of parliamentary life was sown and Indians were admitted to the Legislative Councils by the Indian Councils Act of that year. Until then Europeans enjoyed the exclusive right of legislation for India. Even after 1861, the non-official Indians admitted to the Council by nomination were few. The Council itself met only when there was a legislative measure to be placed before it. This continued until 1892 when, as a result of popular demands, the number of non-official members was increased slightly. Though nominated in form, the members were practically selected by delegates of local bodies. They were given a limited power of interpellation. The annual budget was placed before them for discussion but they had no right to vote upon it. Seventeen years passed before the famous Indian Councils Act of 1909 better known as the Minto-Morley\* Reforms Act was enacted under which the Provincial legislatures had non-official majorities. They could put supplementary questions and move resolutions on matters of public interest subject, however, to too many exceptions. There was a further proviso to the effect that even if accepted by the legislature the resolutions were not to be binding on the executive. And so, the executive wing of the Government still remained the master of the situation, carrying measures which it deemed fit in the teeth of opposition.

India was in a political torpor upto the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century and the efforts to awaken her to a sense of national consciousness led to the formation of the Indian National Congress. The Congress itself was a mild body in the early years of its existence with its leaders extolling the values of moderation. They were mostly men of learned professions who firmly believed that what India needed was a lucid representation of her case before the people and Parliament of Britain. Their main concern was to set up a democratic form of Government for India representing all classes and communities which would be responsible to the people; and they hoped to achieve this end by such methods as public meetings, deputations and the presentation of memorials which were all "modelled directly upon British constitutional

\* The then Viceroy of India and Secretary of State for India.



politics". And their resolutions asked for nothing more than the admission of Indians into the public services in a larger measure, provision for their education and training for responsible posts and election of members to the legislatures. The organisation was chary of putting forth any advanced programme. None of the successive deputations to London in these decades went beyond "appealing" to the British Government. The voice of India was that of a supplicant before "a tyrant armed with despotic powers" and not that of "a nation enjoying the rights and privileges due to the subjects of the English sovereign and to the position of a British citizen". To put it more accurately, the national body's "political agitation decorously confined itself to pious annual resolutions" and nothing more.<sup>25</sup>

#### *Nationalist Upsurge and Repressive Policy:*

Readers must at this stage have a glimpse into the administration of the Governors of Madras from the closing decades of the last century. As a beginning has to be made somewhere, one can begin somewhat arbitrarily with Grant Duff who was appointed by Gladstone's liberal Ministry. But Duff was a liberal only in name. Since his period the Presidency had had a succession of Governors not one of whom had felt any qualms about sins of commission. Though repression was the general policy of the administration everywhere then, the tyrannical measures adopted in the Madras Presidency to combat Indian nationalism were far in excess of the requirement and tarnished the fair face of the British justice. The nationalist organs mercilessly exposed the misdeeds and misuse of power by men occupying gubernatorial positions. And they always had the cordial support of the public.

Grant Duff's governorship was studded with blunders and scandals. He conveniently abdicated his functions to the bureaucracy whose misdeeds he connived at. The quinquennium (1881-1886) of his rule was characterised as "a gala day for revelry in administrative mistakes, mishaps and machinations" which dealt a hard blow on some faithful and devoted subordinate officials. The two most discreditable events of his administration were the Chingleput Ryots' case and the Salem Riots. In the former, the farmers of a village in the Conjeevaram Taluk suffered the worst hardships. Instead of coming to the rescue of the harassed farmers, the Governor allowed the officials to wreak vengeance on the poor

ryots for having dared to level charges against a highly corrupt Tahsildar. Trouble began when the latter attached the property of the farmers in May 1881 in lieu of *kist* (Land Tax) due from them. Some good and efficient officials were even dismissed during the trouble. This episode did not end until the conviction in August 1882 of the Tahsildar on charges of stealing some incriminating official documents.<sup>26</sup>

The second scandal had its origin in an obscure Hindu-Muslim dispute in 1882. The immediate cause for the riot was as usual the question of music before a mosque in Salem. It was a recurring feature and was certainly deplorable. But it was magnified into a "seditious revolt", completely paralysing the authorities. "For three days, there was no British Government in Salem".<sup>27</sup> Immense damage was done to life and property and the mosque was razed to the ground. Many citizens of standing were arrested on trumped up charges and were sent to Andamans after being sentenced to life imprisonment. C. Vijayaraghavachari who rose to the stature of a national leader and was eventually regarded as a grand old man of South India gave legal assistance to some Hindus involved in the fracas. So he was singled out as a ring leader of the Hindus. He was tried and convicted to a sentence of transportation for ten years. He spent some months in prison. However, he succeeded in proving his innocence and was honourably acquitted on 9 January 1883. The following is an excerpt from the graphic description by a reporter of the *Madras Standard* of the Trial of the alleged rioters and of the scene in the Court when the sentence was pronounced: ". . . . . The prisoners when brought in looked haggard and careworn, Vijayaraghavachari, the young Vakil looking broken-hearted and distressed to a degree, that I, in thirteen years' experience, have never before observed in any prisoner. I have seen condemned men before noose around their neck was adjusted. I saw Muller. I saw Youngman. I saw many others, and yet never during the course of my career as a criminal law reporter at the Old Bailey had I seen such a spectacle of dejection at an anticipated future as that unfortunate man, Vijayaraghavachari, presented on the day of his sentence".<sup>28</sup>

During the stormy days of the riots in Salem, its Collector was witnessing horse-race in Bangalore! The Press in Madras launched devastating attacks on Governor Duff. But he remained obstinate and yielded only when Viceroy Ripon threatened to expose the Salem Scandal in London.



Rungaiah Naidu came to the forefront of political agitation in Madras exactly during these days of Duff when the public lived in daily dread of warrants and the press in danger of prosecution. A man of no wealth or accomplishment, Naidu's only asset was his "sterling independence". He rose boldly above the rest in defiance of authority and oppression. His defiance of Carmichael, the senior member of the Executive Council, was a case in point. A few individuals enjoying official favours and benefits arranged, in the name of the public of Madras, a get-together to honour Carmichael. Naidu and other younger public men like G. Subrahmanya Iyer, Anandacharlu, Balaji Rao and others who would have none of it, had the nerve to oppose the move publicly by organising a counter demonstration. He asserted that the career of Carmichael was not such as to deserve any special recognition on the part of Indians. Some years later when the very same men who stood by Naidu against Carmichael congregated to do homage to Governor Wenlock, Naidu courageously took the field again by signing a document of protest against any memoirs for so unpopular a Governor as Wenlock. Wenlock as Governor (1896-1901) did nothing to improve matters. The laxity of his famine administration was the subject of adverse criticism in the Madras press. The Government, which pleaded poverty to demands for remission and which arranged for public meetings to aid famine relief, thought nothing of wasting huge sums of money amounting to tens of thousands of rupees to welcome and entertain the Prince of Wales\* when he visited Madras in 1889.<sup>29</sup> The famine relief measures of Wenlock were not prompt; nor were they popular. A feeling of frustration reigned everywhere. The public became highly critical of the British policy of the extension of railways. Since the great famine of 1877, the Government of India had done much to extend the railways through the districts more liable to famine in South India. These railways, built on meter gauge system, were of great utility in securing the main object for which they were constructed. Nobody could deny the advantages of railways in times of famines. But when the ruling class had set its heart on extending them beyond what was imperatively needed, the public voiced their strong objection.

But the Governors who came after Wenlock proved even worse. Ampthill (1901-'06)\*\* appeared to be a man of abundant promise

\* Future Edward VII.

\*\* Acted as Viceroy from May to December 1904.



and displayed qualities of sympathy which touched the people's heart. It was but a fleeting good. His latter day degeneration was indeed sad for his harsh words and constant accusations of the "Congress and the Congresswallahs" only aggravated the indignation of the nationalist minded. Any criticism of the Government from any quarter was in Ampthill's opinion "ill-informed, uncharitable, dishonest, self-seeking and discontented". Even while delivering the convocation address to the Madras University in 1903, he cautioned the new graduates against falling into the ways of these wicked men who were all actuated by personal gain.<sup>30</sup>

When conditions for a famine were prevalent in 1905 and the public appealed to the Government for ameliorative measures, Ampthill shouted them down asserting that what prevailed then in the Presidency could never be called a famine. He argued most cynically that penurious people had always existed and that the addition in their numbers due to hard times did not constitute a famine. Much more shocking was his utterance that "in England, where the population is the same as that of the Madras Presidency, there are at the present moment and indeed at all times more people on the verge of starvation and sunk in the utmost depths of misery than there are in the Madras Presidency at the present moment. Probably there are in London alone more people than we have here who are subsisting on scraps and who never light a fire to cook a regular meal, but people in England do not cry "famine" on that account or clamour to the Government for exceptional measures". His friend George Hamilton, Secretary of State for India, echoed the same arguments when he said in Britain that India was "prosperous" under the British and not overburdened by taxation. The Madras Press which denounced such falsehoods was accused of carrying a "perpetual railing against the British administration".<sup>31</sup>

To what extent the Madras Government really dreaded the "Congresswallahs" since the beginning of this century is amply borne out by this statement of Ampthill: "Once let the Congresswallah see that the seditious agitation can succeed and he will never drop it. The imitative faculties of the natives of India will then very soon produce on a vast scale the same conditions of unrest, terrorism and tyrannical political influence as prevail in Ireland. The Congresswallah will play the part of the Irish M.P. and the Brahman behind the scenes will do what the Roman Catholic priest does in Ireland".<sup>32</sup> He hated *The Hindu* because it criticised his behaviour too often. About his convocation address referred to

earlier, the paper remarked that a speech of the type delivered by Ampthill to the new graduates would have endangered the political reputation of a British Statesman of any authority “but Lord Ampthill has the consolation that he has not so far built up a political reputation which he need be in fear of losing”.<sup>33</sup> Ampthill told its Editor, M. Veeraraghavachari that his paper could have no weight with influential Englishmen if he persisted in representing such men as Paine, Digby, Dalt and Wedderburn\* as the only persons whose opinions deserved attention and respect.<sup>34</sup>

Public opinion in the Presidency was most vociferous in criticising the *Darbar* extravagance in Delhi in 1903 to celebrate the coronation of Edward VII. The Press denounced it as thoroughly as it could. The Coronation *Darbar* was described as “Curzonation *Darbar*”.<sup>15</sup> It was an impressive ceremony, magnificently planned and lavishly executed. It was a demonstration of the wealth, vastness and might of the British Empire. Thousands of visitors from the outside world went away with the false impression that India was still the eastern *El-Dorado* — a land in which the *pagoda* tree flourished. The Madras Press was loud in its cry that the *Darbar* did not signalise any substantial or definite acts of concession or beneficence. It was pointed out that no boon was conferred on the people by the State to give them material cause for rejoicing; not even a promise was made for which a whole people would feel grateful or whereby their condition would be improved; no mention was made of any reforms being effected such as the admission of competent Indians into the Executive Councils of the Governors, the Viceroys and the Secretaries of State; no abolition, nay, not even a reduction in salt tax or in the land revenue assessment which people eagerly expected. Even the remission of interest for three years on famine loans granted to the Indian peasants was felt to be insignificant considering the magnitude of the occasion. *The Native States*, a Madras paper wrote, “we are sorry, infinitely sorry that the *Darbar* should have, instead of drawing India and England closer, distanced the one from the other and so signally failed to keep up historic continuity”.<sup>36</sup>

The very next year—1904—witnessed the Russo-Japanese War the results of which had proved that the east need not abase itself before the west. It tore the masks of European invincibility and infallibility. The triumph of Japan over Russia at Port Arthur and

\* Friends of India who were connected with the Indian National Congress.



Manchuria altered the balance of power in Asia. Its demonstration of Asian ability to cope with a great European power accelerated the development of the National Movement in India. Even by the end of that decade, college students dreamt of *Swaraj* while pressmen and patriots were hot in its pursuit.

The reaction of the Governors and the bureaucrats of Madras to the change in public opinion was most unfavourable. The new political life blasted their hopes of continuous comfortable living in the “placid waters of Madras”. They became too stiff in their resistance to these. The members belonging to the Indian Civil Service presented a cold shoulder to the politicians of the Congress. A certain “contemptuous indifference” marked the relations of the alien government to the nascent nationalism of the young. But one could understand this attitude on the part of the agents of a foreign power which had long usurped the role of Providence.

#### *The Presidency since 1905 :—*

It was the partition of Bengal (1905) that provoked the entire nation to rise as one man to protest. The bifurcation of Bengal spontaneously unified pockets of nationalist spirit into a grand, irresistible movement for freedom. The extensive reaction to this rash act of Viceroy Curzon and the intensive agitation to undo the wrong could be called the first chapter in the history of India’s national war against the British Government. The whole of India felt a fraternal sympathy for Bengal. *Vande Mataram*\* became the holy *mantra* of every Indian Nationalist after this upheaval. The same chant was treated as an act of sedition by the British who had always regarded it as a dangerous slogan. According to one interpretation the slogan did not connote “Hail, Motherland” but “Hail, Mother” which meant Kali, the Goddess of death and destruction and was, therefore, associated with scenes of riot and bloodshed. It was contended that by appealing to the “demoralising” instincts of Hinduism, it aimed at the overthrow of the British. Rees, an English author, reported that students shouted the cry of “Fankwei, or foreign devil” into the ears of passing whitemen far more aggressively than ever before.<sup>37</sup>

\* The phrase *Vande Mataram* (or *Bande Mataram*) was coined by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in his novel *Ananda Math* published in 1861. The author puts this phrase through the mouths of the Hindu *Sanyasins*, who revolted against their sovereign lord, the Nawab of Bengal, in the eighteenth century.



Hectic days of *Swadeshism* and boycott of *Videshi* goods followed the anti-partition agitation. Despite the repressive measures of the Government, the citizens of Madras protested against the “Bengal terror” at Public meetings. The year 1906 was declared the *Swadeshi* year. The slogan “Be Indian, buy Indian” was heard everywhere. It was during this year (1906) that the Congress received a new orientation of policy. During the 1906 session of the Congress at Calcutta, Dadabhai Naoroji, the Father of the Congress, who had made valuable contributions to the Indian economic problems, gave the country the gospel of *Swadeshi* and *Swaraj*, as the twin objectives of the Congress. While *Swaraj* was the definite objective to which all efforts and attempts of the Congress should be directed, *Swadeshi* was the definite means by which economically and politically that aim was to be achieved. All activity and agitation in respect of administrative, political, industrial or economic improvements came to be treated as subsidiary to this main purpose and policy of the Congress. It was during this year again that V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, founded his “Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company” in the southern port town of Tuticorin.<sup>38</sup>

The Madras leaders exercised tremendous moderation and self-control in the face of grave provocation. The Madras nationalist papers themselves applauded them on showing considerable restraint in their sympathy for the boycott programme. But that moderation was not to continue any longer. The scare of a second mutiny spread by the malicious Anglo-Indian Press on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the Great Mutiny of 1857 culminated in the arrest and deportation of Lala Lajpat Rai. Lalaji was punished on the strength of a report by an irresponsible and anonymous scribbler in an Anglo-Indian paper that he had command of an army of a hundred thousand desperadoes. There were in fact no mutinous or rebellious proclivities among the people or in any portion of the Indian army.<sup>39</sup> There was of course dissatisfaction caused by the wrong headed legislative action and harsh and unjust administrative and judicial acts and measures. Lalaji had no connection whatsoever with any revolutionary project or propaganda. It was clear from the start that all this scare about a mutiny or a rebellion was due partly to panic and partly to the desire to create a prejudice against the Indians in England and to rouse the apprehensions of the people there about the safety of the Empire and the lives and property of their countrymen in India.<sup>40</sup> Without even giving a hearing, the Government deported Lajpat Rai to Mandalay

on 9 May 1907 to be immured in a dungeon there.

Lalaji was one of the greatest of patriots who dwelt in the hearts of millions of Indians. Naturally the impact of the incident on the public of Madras was “electric”. This unprecedented injustice done to the “Punjab lion” on a false charge of conspiracy had a deeper effect than that created by even the partition of Bengal. Thereafter even the mildest of moderates cast off their conservatism and expressed themselves in the “most extreme language”. G. Subrahmanya Iyer wrote a very aggressive letter to *The Hindu*: “The boasted freedom of British rule in India now stands exposed in its horrid nakedness . . . . . British statesmen fully saturated by the spirit and tradition of the British nation have sacrificed one of our most trusted and high souled leaders for the blood thirstiness of the Anglo-Indians”. Referring to the spirit of nationalism that had engulfed the whole country since 1905, he wrote “. . . Now in the face of the changed attitude of the people, the bureaucracy will grasp more closely than ever every power it can arrogate to itself by virtue of its unrestrained despotism and will be constantly incited against us by the growing class of unscrupulous fortune hunters infesting our land”.<sup>41</sup> Congress leaders of Madras visited every nook and corner of the Presidency in pursuance of their mission of preparing the ground for the liberation struggle at the grass-root levels. Every effort was made to fraternise the educated political workers with the masses of the people. They told the masses of the high-handed actions of the Government, of its repressive measures, of the summary deportation of Congress leaders, of the revival of obsolete ordinances, of the prohibition of public meetings and of the misrepresentations of the Anglo-Indian Press. They exhorted the public to work together to achieve the four articles of the Indian political creed — *Swadeshi*, boycott of foreign goods, temperance and *Swaraj*. *Swadeshism* had caught hold of their minds and they responded enthusiastically to the exhortation of the leaders braving official displeasure and harassment. A beginning was thus made now to identify the intelligentsia with the people though it was far from complete.

College students also came out in large numbers to organise protest meetings against the British Indian administration. They made a bonfire of foreign clothes. Recalling his student days, the great parliamentarian and freedom fighter Satyamurti observes: “we had exciting time when I was a student in the Madras Christian



College. Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal visited Madras and we, students, got thoroughly excited. We attended all his lectures. Lala Lajpat Rai was deported. We boycotted the classes . . . . .”<sup>42</sup>

The Governor of Madras at this time was Lawley successor of Amphill. He was a strong man who fought “sedition” mercilessly. He encouraged industrial development in Madras, notwithstanding Morley’s opposition to free trade. Unfortunately, he was from the outset a strong opponent of *swadeshism* and economic boycott. He was in fact a well-distinguished imperialist who tried to throttle to death pure *swadeshism* in its infancy while publicly proclaiming his sympathy for its encouragement. The contradictions and concealments in his economic policies landed the Presidency in a muddle. Textiles being a major industry of the Madras Presidency, the liberal import of textiles from Britain affected the economy of the Presidency to no small degree. Boycott of British goods of which textiles were the major imports was the only way out of the muddle. The boycott would certainly injure the British industry for a while but the damage would not be even a fraction of what the Indian economy suffered. The boycott of British goods *ipso-facto* implied encouragement of the *Swadeshi* movement. The erstwhile American colonies were pace-setters in fighting the economic exploitation by Britain. They simultaneously adopted the twin policies of boycott of foreign goods and encouragement of indigenous production though they never explicitly labelled their policies as boycott and *Swadeshi*. The British critics of the boycott-*Swadeshi* policy of the Congress sought to drive a wedge between boycott and *swadeshi*. They made a distinction where there was no difference.

The Madras Presidency threw up a national pioneer who sponsored the *Swadeshi* movement on the maritime front. It was V.O. Chidambaram Pillai to whose *Swadeshi* Steam Navigation Company reference has already been made. This Company plied a steam ship between Tuticorin and Colombo. Pillai launched the venture as a deliberate challenge to the British India Steam Navigation Company. His primary idea was to put an end to the commercial supremacy of the British on the Indian seas. But the Government politicised everything. Governor Lawley could not just tolerate anything about Pillai’s *Swadeshi* Steam Company. He sought to ruin this venture in all possible ways with the aid of Wynch, Collector of Tinnevely and Ashe, Sub-Collector of Tuticorin. Harassment of the workers in the *Swadeshi* Company included deliberate delay in

the departure of ships from Tuticorin. Pillai braved immeasurable hardships in this behalf. *Pillai's pioneering endeavour on the maritime front again gives the lie to the indictment that the Madras Presidency was "benighted" vis-a-vis the nationalist awakening.*

Lawley's regime was a series of inglorious occurrences. It was a record of unrelieved "repression and no reform", of "reaction and no progress".<sup>43</sup> He made no efforts for the proper implementation of the Minto-Morley Reforms Scheme which culminated in the Indian Councils Act of 1909. He was against both the expansion of the Legislative Council and the inclusion of Indians on his Executive Councils which the Act provided. He said: "we have been in India as rulers for about a century and a half and if the testimony of competent observers is to be believed the gulf between the colours is wider and deeper than ever. We are alien rulers and alien we shall be to the end of time".<sup>44</sup> Lawley's harshness and severity in tackling the unrest spreading in the Presidency exhibited a total lack of love for the people. There was a general feeling that he was too much in the hands of his councillors. His Government was widely condemned for rustivating a large number of students of the Rajahmundri college for their "offence" of wearing the *Vande Mataram* lockets.

But the most shocking incident of his period — the assassination of Ashe, then Collector of Tinnevely at Maniachi Railway Station in June 1911 — was the result of the brutalities perpetrated on the patriots of Tinnevely in 1907 and 1908. The repercussions which were felt throughout the Presidency following the crisis in Bengal have already been discussed. It was in that emotionally surcharged atmosphere that Bipin Chandra Pal, one of the foremost extremist national leaders, toured the whole of the Presidency in April and May 1907.\* His lectures on *Swaraj*, *Swadeshi* and boycott evoked an instantaneous response from the people, particularly the youth of the Presidency who no longer believed they could get justice from the British through moderate methods. Successive disappointments and disillusionments had changed their attitude towards the English. Pal's contribution towards catalysing the nationalist spirit in the Presidency and unifying it with the grand National Movement cannot be belittled. Some authors are of the opinion that it

\* This was his second visit to Madras, the first one being in 1887 when he attended the Madras session of the Congress.



was Pal who awakened the people of the Presidency from their torpor. This opinion, however, does not reckon with the level of national awakening that had already been attained in the Presidency. Pal's speeches were the sparks that ignited the smouldering nationalist spirit in the Presidency. Had the Presidency been unprepared to receive Pal's message, it could not have roused such a spontaneous and widespread response among the masses and the classes at once. His utterances had a great impact particularly on the youth some of whom turned aggressive. Following his visit to Rajahmundri the students of the Rajahmundri College went on a strike on 24 April 1907. Pal's lecture tour, however came to an abrupt close consequent upon the deportation of Lala Lajpat Rai from the Punjab on 9 May 1907. Bipin Pal's incarceration in September 1907 for refusal to give evidence in connection with the charges against Aurobindo Ghose, as Editor of the *Bande Mataram*, only fuelled the flame of nationalism. Gadicherla Harisarvottama Rao and V.O. Chidambaram Pillai spearheaded the "extremist thinking" respectively in the Telugu and Tamil areas of the Presidency. The spirit of *Vande Mataram* which was engulfing the entire Presidency, found a more eloquent expression in certain places like Cocanada, Rajahmundri and Masulipatam in Andhra and Tinnevely in Tamil Nad. But the worst affected area was Rajahmundry, where the students of the Government College were severely dealt with by the Principal for insubordination when they boycotted their classes to mark their protest against the oppressive British administration.<sup>4</sup> The Government gave their wholehearted support in all the disciplinary measures which the Principal deemed advisable to take. Later, when Pal was released on 9 March 1908, there was an outburst of enthusiasm everywhere in the south which found expression in meetings and processions. Even before his release, in anticipation of the event, there was celebration in Tuticorin where elaborate meetings and processions were organised and spirited speeches made by Chidambaram Pillai and his fellow patriots on 5 March 1908. Pal was characterised as the "Lion of *Swaraj*" and it was suggested that the flag of *Swaraj* should be hoisted on the occasion of his release. On 9 March Chidambaram Pillai delivered a speech in Tinnevely eulogising Pal. He called upon the people to boycott everything foreign and assured them that *Swaraj* would be obtained within three months.<sup>45</sup> Collector Wynch, who was hell-bent on curbing the activities of Chidambaram Pillai, ordered the latter

to see him at Tinnevely soon after the meeting. Pillai did so accompanied by Subrahmania Siva and Padmanabha Iyengar.

Subrahmania Bharati, the Tamil bard of Indian freedom, has captured in immortal words the sparks of the patriotic spirit that came out of Chidambaram Pillai's verbal clashes with Wynch, the arrogant British collector of Tinnevely. They form two very inspiring poems of seven stanzas each and are captioned *Vellaikkara Wynch Durai Koottru* (The British Collector Wynch's utterances) and *Desabhaktan Chidambaram Pillai Marumozhi* (Patriot Chidambaram Pillai's Reply). The following is an English rendering of Bharati's graphic portrayal:<sup>46</sup>

*Wynch :*

Pillai, you inspired (in Tamil youths) a  
sense of freedom, nationalism and fanned  
its flames across the nation; I will fetter  
you and sentence you and punish you.

You gathered people together, gave them the  
battle cry *Vande mataram* deliberately to  
insult the English and showered abuses on  
us; You launched a ship to drive us away  
and earned a lot of money.

You inspired a cowardly people telling them  
about their rights and the truth; You told  
them it was ignominious to be exploited  
to death.

You exhorted them to be bold  
You made men of impotent slaves and wiped  
their stigma; You instilled aspirations  
into the complacent poor.

You awakened the humble servants and  
demanded name and fame for them; You  
showed them myriad ways to thrive and  
drove their fatalism away.

You sowed the seeds of the quest for freedom  
everywhere Rabbit that you are, how dare  
you emulate the lion and elevate your kin?



I pity you from the bottom of my heart,  
I will shoot you, who will dare question me?  
I will clap you in prison and avenge your  
impertinence.

*Chidambaram Pillai :*

We will not kneel before aliens on our own soil;  
We no longer fear your threats  
No nation in the world will brook this injustice  
Nor God idly watch the *same*.

We will hail our mother land *Vande Mataram*  
Unto our last breath.  
And bow down to Her in patriotic reverence.  
Is it a crime or disgrace  
To eulogise my beloved Mother?

Should you loot all our wealth unto our death?  
Men that we are,  
would we meekly weep and wail?  
No. We cherish our honour  
More than our lives.

Are we, the thirty crores of Indians,  
Dogs and the young ones of pigs  
For you as men to look down upon?  
Is it just? or mere foolhardiness?

Is it a sin for you to love our nation?  
Or do you have any quarrel with her?  
Is it a crime to listen to our complaints  
and solve our problems?

We have found that unity is strength.  
We will not cave in at your cruelties;  
We are clear-headed  
You can't shake us.

Even if you cut our flesh to pieces  
You cannot have your sway  
The love that throbs in our hearts will never die  
We won't rest until we gain our quest.

Soon after the meeting, prosecution was started against Chidambaram Pillai, Subrahmania Siva and Padmanabha Iyengar for disturbing the peace. Padmanabha Iyengar was acquitted. Chidambaram Pillai and Subrahmania Siva were arrested on 12 March 1908. In the proceedings that followed, they were refused bail and were remanded to custody. According to the judgment of the Tinnevely Sessions Court, Chidambaram Pillai and Subrahmania Siva were “traitors”: they conspired together to excite disaffection towards the Government by delivery of speeches in Tuticorin on 23 and 25 February and 5 March 1908 advocating absolute *Swaraj* and inciting the mob against Government. Pillai was convicted to a sentence of transportation for forty years — twenty for delivering seditious speeches and twenty for “abetting” Siva in his seditious propaganda against the British Government. Siva was awarded a sentence of transportation for ten years for his revolutionary propaganda.\* This had immediate repercussions in the whole district of Tinnevely. There were violent outbursts of fury. In Tinnevely town and Palayamcottah *hartal* was observed to protest against the treatment meted out to Chidambaram Pillai who symbolised the nationalist aspirations of the entire Presidency. In the campaign of repression that followed, the Government arrested and imprisoned anyone who spoke or wrote against the penalties inflicted on the patriot. Lawley’s “monstrous sentences” moved even Morley to protest. G. Subrahmania Iyer who had turned an ardent *swadeshi* and boycotter was one of the victims. Towards the close of 1907 he went on a lecture tour of the south and there were enthusiastic audiences to listen to him everywhere. At the North Arcot District Political Conference, he urged the giving up of titles and honorary offices under the British — items which formed part of the great Non-co-operation Movement launched thirteen years later by Mahatma Gandhi. Later in August 1908 while he was in Courtallam to recoup his health, he was arrested on charges of sedition.<sup>47</sup> A bail application moved on his behalf was dismissed by the High Court and he was removed to the penitentiary. The prosecution was however withdrawn by the Crown Prosecutor Nugent Grant on certain conditions being acceded to by Subrahmania Iyer.<sup>48</sup>

\* On their appeal to the High Court of Madras, the latter reduced the terms of imprisonment. In the case of Pillai it was reduced to six and four which would run concurrently. In the case of Siva it became six.



The *hartal* at Palayamcottah assumed serious proportions with the frenzied mob razing public buildings to the ground. Furniture and records of many Government buildings were set fire to. The Municipal office was gutted. In the *melee* that ensued four innocent persons were gunned down on the orders of the District Magistrate. Even the news of these untoward happenings reached Madras very late as a detailed telegram sent for publication in *The Hindu* was deliberately delayed by the telegraph authorities. The situation in Tinnevely thereafter became very acute and the air was full of secret cries for vengeance. The Telugu paper *Swarajya*, which revived its publication in Bezvada (Krishna District) to commemorate the release of Pal, carried an article condemning strongly the arrest of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai. The article concluded thus: "Hello, Feringhee! Cruel tiger! the arbitrary Feringhee rule is drying up at the mere breeze of the development of Indian Nationalism".<sup>49</sup>

The excesses committed by the mob were deplorable. But the authorities invited them. The European high officials present there could have adopted a policy of clearheadedness, of justice and of humanity. It was in their hands to effectively bring the rioters under control by persuasion and conciliation. But the officials of the Madras Presidency became furious and acted precipitately. Sub-Collector Ashe of Tuticorin was unfair to the accused leaders and unflattering in his remarks about them. Ashe had even quartered a punitive police in Tuticorin. And these offended many.

The Tinnevely incidents had their repercussions in other parts of the Presidency also. At a public meeting convened at Karur in Coimbatore district on 17 March 1908 the *Swadeshi* effort at Tuticorin was lauded. It was asked why should not they of Karur follow suit and demolish the *pardesi* (foreign) courts of the Collector, Munsif and Police? The speaker Krishnaswamy was forthwith tried, convicted and punished. In June 1908 the printer and publisher of the Tamil paper *India* published from Madras was convicted in the High Court for seditious articles which appeared in it on 23 and 27 May and 27 June 1908.<sup>50</sup> The paper ceased to function in Madras but reappeared from Pondicherry.

It was during this year—1908—that the twenty third session of the Indian National Congress was held in Madras in the face of bitter opposition. There were valid reasons for this opposition from the leaders in the Presidency. The whole country was then in an unsettled frame of mind in the wake of the unseemly occurrence

at Surat in 1907.\* Madras was already in a disturbed and unquiet state following the cruel treatment meted out to, and inhuman sentences imposed on, patriots in Tinnevely district. Then there was the fact that the Nationalists who were dubbed Extremists were snuffed out of the Madras Provincial Congress. After the Surat session, the Madras Congress was literally herded into the moderate camp. *The Hindu* was strongly opposed to the holding of the session in Madras. Srinivasa Sastri between whom and *The Hindu* there was no love lost wrote “Young Madras is up in arms against this Congress and its organisers. Everywhere you hear nothing but abuse and uncharity. We owe it mostly to *The Hindu*”.<sup>51</sup> If moderate leaders like Sastri and Sivaswamy Iyer were also initially against convening the session at Madras it was because they were afraid of Madras becoming a second Surat. An appeal was however made to Kasturiranga Iyengar, Editor of *The Hindu*, to co-operate.<sup>52</sup>

Ultimately, V. Krishnaswamy Iyer\*\* who was chiefly instrumental in holding the session in Madras in 1908 carried the day, Governor Lawley graciously lent him his tents for the Congress session.<sup>53</sup> Referring to the Nationalists of the Congress. Krishnaswamy Iyer said that “the gangrened limb must be amputated”.<sup>54</sup> Srinivasa Sastri who was associated with him during this session as “a small lieutenant in that army of combatants on the political field” pays rich tributes to Krishnaswamy Iyer’s strength, fighting qualities and extraordinary capacity to run a session of the Congress single-handed under exceptional difficulties.<sup>55</sup> Yes, he succeeded in pulling

\*Even before the Session of the Congress, two groups had emerged in that organisation which had forced the transfer of the venue from Nagpur (a Nationalist stronghold) to Surat. The Nationalists (who were thereafter called Extremists) led by Tilak became furious when they learnt that there were attempts to go back on the resolutions adopted at the previous Congress regarding *Swaraj*, *Swadeshi*, boycott and national education. When the session began there were disturbances. When Surendranath Banerjee began to speak, he was howled down by the Nationalists, the “Madras and Nagpur Nationalists taking the chief part in the inglorious proceedings . . . . . The uproar, confusion and unseemly behaviour that prevailed was unparalleled in the history of any great public gathering in India in the past”. (*The Hindu*, 28 December 1907). A free fighting ensued in the Congress *pandal* and the police had to be called in. The session ended in confusion. Later, the Moderates adopted a new Constitution excluding the Nationalists from the Congress.

\*\*A most distinguished and powerful leader of South India who was associated with the Indian National Congress since it first met at Madras in 1887.



that Congress through. The session was held under the Presidency of Rash Behari Ghose and was attended by Gokhale, Pherozeshah Mehta and Surendranath Banerjee. It was the first Congress held under a properly drafted and approved constitution.<sup>56</sup>

At this Congress, College students served as volunteers. In those days, a volunteer was a heroic figure, bold and intrepid in facing the enemy.

Towards the close of the 1910s, patriotism in the presidency blended with religion. A band of young English educated men — Nilakanta Brahmachari, Sankara Krishna Iyer and Vanchi Iyer, to mention but a few — who hailed mostly from the Tinnevely region, formed the Bharata Mata Association. They took an oath in the name of Mother Goddess who was christened Bharata Mata (Mother India). The substance of the oath was that they would liquidate every Englishman on Indian soil unto the day India achieved independence. The oath was ritually sanctified by their blood: each one cut his right thumb and shed drops of blood at the altar of the Mother Goddess. In 1910, Nilakanta Brahmachari and Sankara Krishna Iyer were touring South India, preaching *Swadeshi* and *Swaraj* and inducing their followers of all castes to take a blood oath.<sup>57</sup> This association proved unambiguously that the Madras Presidency did not lag behind the rest of India in its militant march towards freedom. The blood oath was not an empty effervescent melodrama enacted on impulse. Its denouement was the assassination of Ashe by Vanchi Iyer, a clerk in the Travancore Forest Department, on 17 June 1911.

Ashe was the very emblem of imperial arrogance and cruelty. As Sub-Collector of Tuticorin he unleashed a reign of terror. His haughtiness had provoked the ire of the members of the Bharata Mata Association who “hatched” a plot to liquidate him. Vanchi Iyer who executed the murder had to learn the ABC of using the gun. He did it and proved that the blood oath was not an impulsive melodrama. Vanchi Iyer assassinated Ashe, who was travelling with his wife, scared away those who tried to catch him and shot himself. His suicide left the police high and dry without any clues to the murder plot. There were angry outbursts from many quarters at the outrage committed by Vanchi Iyer. All the nationalist organs including *The Hindu* deprecated the murder as a grisly crime which would harm rather than help the cause for which the nation was fighting. An anti-nationalist Tamil paper compared the act to a clot of earth trying in vain to subdue a mountain. Every European

in India condemned it. But the unkindest cut emanated from the pen of Alexander Cardew: "Like dogs attacked with rabbies they hit anyone they meet without any clear perception of the purpose in view. I wish we could stamp out the disease".<sup>58</sup>

Fortunately, there was no similar occurrence ever thereafter in the Presidency.

A murder is a murder and there could be no justification of Vanchi Iyer's dastardly act. But a threadbare analysis of all the preceding events would show that Vanchi Iyer had been driven to it. The assassin — be he a narrow-minded nationalist or a fanatical chauvinist — was an eye-witness to the heinous treatment accorded to fellow patriots and to the gruesome killing of four men for no other reason than defying the law against taking out processions. The cruelties were inflicted by the officials under the direction of Ashe, then Sub-Collector of Tuticorin. Vanchi Iyer was particularly outraged at the disgraceful manner in which the British officials treated Chidambaram Pillai. Righteously angered at the extreme sentences on political comrades, young Vanchi Iyer took the ultimate revenge on Ashe even at the cost of his own life.

He was unquestionably more extreme than the most extreme in the Presidency as he was the first to practise the cult of violence. Anarchism was alien to the soil of India and more so to that of Madras. Still one wonders if the opprobrious term of a "terrorist" can be applied to Vanchi Iyer, who has certainly earned a place among that band of patriots, which consisted of Bhagat Singh,\* Madanlal Dinghra\*\* and others who were actuated by their own conscience and sense of duty. Their love for their Mother Country and burning desire to see her free could never be curbed. If their action was not applauded then even by nationalists, it was because they wielded weapons and the cult of bomb was in evidence. *The Hindu* which described it as the "most wanton and unprovoked outrage which has up to now been recorded in the history of these disgraceful outrages" wrote decades later that it was the natural

\* On 8 April 1929, he dropped two bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly Chamber which exploded in quick succession followed by two revolver shots. Bhagat Singh was disarmed and arrested. Later he was executed along with two of his comrades in March 1931, for an earlier offence of shooting a European political officer.

\*\* He murdered Sir Curzon Wylie in London at a public meeting in 1907. He was hanged.



outcome of the disturbances and sentences imposed on the patriots at Tinnevely a couple of years earlier.<sup>59</sup>

Though after 1919 under Gandhiji's stewardship the nation marched on to achieve its goal of *Swaraj* through the path of non-violence, India had never failed to cherish the memory of this band of martyrs. It was in fact these extremist patriots who proved that "Gandhiji was not making a virtue of any weakness of Indian character in turning his back on violence. He had only sublimated the courage they had shown to a higher level of the spirit where the enemy could be overcome with self-suffering and hatred ceased to be".<sup>60</sup>

After the murder of Ashe, the fiat of the Madras Government was — Repress, imprison, deport, hang! Vanchi Iyer's suicide had a devastating effect upon the public life of the Presidency. With no clue as to his actual accomplices in what was construed to be a great conspiracy against the *Raj*, the police resorted to unprecedented and indiscriminate arrests in Tinnevely. Suspicion was as good as proof for the Madras Government. Many an innocent patriot was driven by these repressive measures into exile in the French settlement of Pondicherry. The bard of national freedom, Subrahmania Bharati, was among those who had to flee to Pondicherry and seek refuge there. These exiles were shadowed, threatened and psychologically persecuted by a gang of British police stationed in Pondicherry.<sup>61</sup> They braved all the hazards and hardships with true patriotic fervour. The exiles found ample recompense for these adversities in their friendship with and proximity to one another. The part they played during these days formed a vital element in the history of the war of liberation. Many of the literary outpourings of Subrahmania Bharati were composed during this period of exile.

The various arrests and imprisonments resorted to by the Madras Government made one point crystal clear — that the British were mortally afraid of the young "anarchists" and revolutionaries who "demoralised" the police, the administration and the loyalists.

### *Nineteen Fourteen:*

Pentland\* was the Governor of Madras when the First World

\* Lawley's immediate successor was Thomas Gibbon Carmichael. Though too brief, his was the most unclouded period in the history of the Presidency. He was succeeded by Pentland in 1912.

war broke out. For Madras, the very first year of the war 1914 was both a critical and challenging one. It had the first taste of the war very early. It witnessed the bombing by *Emden* in 1914 and thereby hangs an interesting episode.

Champakaraman Pillai of Nanjil in Trivandrum was a promising young Tamil who had to leave India in the first decade of the century at a tender age for what the British Indian Government construed to be anti-Government activities. Pillai stayed in Zurich (Switzerland) for about six years where he formed an International Pro-India Committee and also edited the journal *Pro India*. He left Zurich in 1914 and served in the German Foreign Office in Berlin. He settled in Berlin and cultivated the good will of the Kaiser of Germany. He organised there the Indian National Workers' Army under the German general staff, of course with the help and co-operation of Germany.<sup>62</sup> The Army included among its members Hardayal, founder of the *Ghadr*, Tarakanth Das, Barkatulla, Chandra K. Chakrabarti and Heramba Lal Gupta.<sup>63</sup> Pillai kindled a sense of patriotism in the Indian prisoners of war held in Germany. He set up an army camp at Mesopotamia wherefrom he established secret contacts with Indian Nationalist leaders. Thus R. Champakaraman Pillai anticipated Subbhas Chandra Bose in his revolutionary patriotic designs as early as the First World War.

Pillai came to the shores of Madras in the German submarine *Emden*\* which shelled the city, created panic among its people, eluded the imperial navy and struck terror in the minds of both the Indian people and their British rulers.<sup>64</sup> The efforts of the Government which announced a most handsome reward of £ 1,00,000 for anyone capturing Pillai did not bear fruit. Jawaharlal Nehru who met Pillai in Germany in 1933 observed that Pillai relegated social and economic problems to the background and concentrated on nationalism.<sup>65</sup> It is disheartening to know that ultimately he was killed by the fanatical Nazis in Berlin in May 1934 at the age of 43.<sup>66</sup>

The chequered career of V.V.S. Iyer is yet another proof for the early political awakening that was in evidence in the Madras Presidency. Iyer was a confirmed Moderate when he went to England to pursue his legal studies. He came out in flying colours in all the examinations. However, when he was called to the Bar, he refused

\* According to one version it was his own vessel and he was its chief engineer and commander.



to take the oath of allegiance to the king of England. He would not recognise him as a sovereign over his motherland.<sup>67</sup> He was surely the first non-co-operator of South India, perhaps of all India. He remained a non-co-operator throughout his political life. He became a pioneer of the Indian Movement in England. He was attracted to the revolutionary strand that was in vogue among the Indian students in London. Soon he became the trusted lieutenant of the fiery Indian revolutionary Veer Damodar Savarkar and the Vice President of his party the *Abhinav Bharat*. Iyer was pursued by the British police but he dodged them all round the world\* and finally landed in Pondicherry in November 1910.<sup>68</sup> He had had many fascinating escapades.

Back on the Indian soil, Iyer fervently took to promoting revolutionary violence against the British. He synthesised out of Napoleon's War Memoirs and the indigenous war treatises an elaborate blue print for a guerilla warfare against the British Government. Lokamanya Tilak who very much wanted to read Iyer's war plans, sent his nephew to Iyer to copy down the manuscripts. To ensure the safety of both the manuscripts and the messenger from the clutches of the CIDs, Iyer sent the latter back in the guise of a gipsy.<sup>69</sup>

His nine year stay in Pondicherry was fully packed not merely with heroic acts which he carried on with unruffled courage in the face of worst dangers but also with brilliant literary achievements. His revolutionary activities consisted in regular smuggling of revolvers, proscribed literature and arms and ammunition to British India. It would also appear that it was under Iyer's guidance that Vanchi Iyer shot Ashe in 1911. This is supported by Nilakanta Brahmachari's statement that Vanchi Iyer was trained in gun shooting by V.V.S. Iyer.<sup>70</sup> When it became impossible to dislodge him from Pondicherry by means fair or foul, the British Indian Government hit upon the idea of implicating him in the *Emden's*

\* While staying in a hotel in London he foiled the attempt of a Scotland Yard Spy with an urgent warrant to arrest him. Notwithstanding Iyer's attire like a Sardarji, the spy had the least doubt that he was the "South Indian Brahman revolutionary" that he was to arrest. Still to fix his identity, he handed over a telegram addressed "To V.V.S. Iyer". Iyer with an uncanny presence of mind lost no time in returning it unopened telling the CID that he was delivering it to the wrong addressee! When the latter quickly pointed to the inscription "V.V.S." on Iyer's handbag, he replied promptly that his name was Veer Vikram Singh! The CID went away quietly (*V.V.S. Iyer Papers*).

bombardment of 1914. France being an ally of Britain then, it deported him to Algiers, their colony in Africa. The general amnesty of 1920 brought him back to the Indian scene.<sup>71</sup> Reminiscing how Iyer a revolutionary mellowed down greatly under Gandhiji's influence, an admirer of Iyer wrote that if India had "gone the way of violence, even as China or Ireland, Iyer would perhaps have been counterpart in India of Sun Yat Sen or Michael Collins".<sup>72</sup>

The career of V.V.S. Iyer is yet another evidence that falsifies the allegation that Madras was "benighted". A young man with brilliant academic achievements, Iyer gave up the prospects of a lucrative legal practice, refused to recognise the authority of the British Crown over India, took terrible risks and actively promoted revolutionary patriotism in the Madras Presidency from the second decade of this century. The episodes of Champakaraman Pillai and V.V.S. Iyer in the history of our National Movement indicate that patriots hailing from the Madras Presidency explored all possible avenues, including revolutionary violence at home and opportunistic alliances abroad to further the cause of India's freedom.

Recapitulating the days of the freedom struggle in the Madras Presidency Frederick Grubb, the London correspondent of *The Hindu* observed on the occasion of the inauguration of the new constitution of India in January 1950: "It was a fashion in some quarters at that time\* to speak of Madras as the 'Benighted Presidency', but from what I know of its outstanding leaders there was little justification for such a taunt".<sup>73</sup>

However, the National Movement in the Presidency had to face a great challenge from 1916. The Non-Brahman Movement which began then chequered the rising tide of nationalism. The Movement was purely personal in its origins. But the hitherto rigid and repressive caste structure of the society in South India turned out to be a convenient sounding board for the clarion call of the leaders of this Movement.

\* Last years of the nineteenth century. Because Grubb first came to India as a delegate to the Madras session of the Congress in 1898.



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## CHAPTER TWO

# Origins of the Non-Brahman Movement

### *Brahman domination—myth or reality?*

The negative label “Non” prefixed to any movement merely as a way of distinguishing a particular group in society will, in course of time, discriminate against a convenient “outgroup” juxtaposed to it. This has been more than exemplified in the case of the celebrated Non-Brahman Movement launched in the Presidency of Madras in 1916. It was originally founded as a movement to protect and to promote the welfare of the majority communities in the Hindu Society in the Madras Presidency. Though it had the potential to become a powerful positive movement, it was refracted into a communal force, thanks to the personal frustration of a few influential individuals. The objectives of the Movement turned out to be the ending of Brahman “domination” in the Presidency and the crushing of Congress which was perceived as a synonym for Brahman. While it succeeded marvellously in blocking the Brahmans’ progress, it failed miserably in stifling the Congress Movement.

This anti-Brahman feeling was a totally new phenomenon, the like of which had not been witnessed in the earlier epochs in the Presidency. Until this movement was ushered in, all the castes of the society lived in amity. It cannot therefore be called the “spontaneous explosion” of centuries of pent-up grievances against the Brahman caste. An impartial analysis of the whole episode will show that the underlying cause of the Movement was nothing but a tale of frustrated ambitions of power-seeking individuals. It was thus an opportunistic alliance of the high brows of certain castes. The oft-repeated postulate of some non-Brahmans that the Brahmans had always held a dominant position over the other castes in all spheres of life—social, economic and political—cannot be accepted without a liberal amount of salt as it is not consistently borne out by historical evidence.



The Brahmans no doubt formed a most privileged elite of the Hindu society through the ages, but they could not have certainly 'put down' or 'tormented' the non-Brahmans in the political arena in the earlier centuries for the simple reason that they never acted as rulers. The kings of the Tamil country were not Brahmans; nor were they Kshatriyas. Ethnically most of the rulers in the kingdoms especially the smaller ones were descendants of tribal chiefs. In politics, says Charles Eliot, the Brahmans "had the good sense to rule by serving to be Ministers, not Kings".<sup>1</sup> Even in State-craft, it may surprise many to know, the Brahmans did not dominate. There were, of course, a few notable Brahman Prime Ministers who served under the Cholas and the Nayak rulers but the majority of the Ministers were drawn from the leading Vellala families. This was because the Brahmans' erudition and learning were not required to administer the *nadus*, *kottams* or *vishayas* of those days.<sup>2</sup>

The Brahmans' position in the economic sphere could never have been enviable except in very rare cases. The commonalty depended for livelihood on voluntary gifts from all classes of people from the King downwards. The gifts were, however, always forthcoming from the munificent royalty and nobility who were anxious to keep the Brahmans above want so that they could dedicate themselves exclusively to learning and teaching. There are innumerable inscriptions to testify to the immense importance that the Kings, the nobility and all other classes of people attached to the Brahmans' dispassionate thinking and arbitration on all problems of social well-being. The practice of donating fertile villages to Brahmans called the *Brahmadeya Gramas* which began with the Pallava monarchs in the seventh century was continued under the Cholas and later under the Vijayanagar Emperors. But the Brahmans seldom exploited this custom to aggrandize land holdings and build up political or economic power. On the other hand, it was the Vellala community, especially the high caste Mudaliars and Pillais, who formed the traditional landed gentry known as *Perunilakkizhaar*. This was only the general pattern. For, there were among the Vellalas too, landless peasants and subsistence cultivators. After the fall of the Vijayanagar Empire in 1565 the position of the Brahmans became shaky. Consequent upon a change in the political conditions, the Brahmans lost the economic support they had been receiving for centuries from the state.<sup>3</sup> The cessation of state support hit them hard.

In the field of religion, they were certainly a force to reckon with. Sanskrit learning, which became their monopoly, received a great impetus under the Pallavas who were active patrons of that language. Barring a negligible minority who entered the State service, in the army and elsewhere, the Brahmans generally confined themselves to religious and intellectual pursuits. They were not affluent as “they always stood outside the race for wealth and power”.<sup>4</sup> Hence the highly respected position they occupied in civil life in those days. There are, however, concrete evidences to show that the Brahmans, who were powerful and were highly esteemed had not been “dominant” even in the religious arena. The *bhakti* cult which received fresh impetus in the Tamil country thanks to the indefatigable efforts of the *Nayanmars* (Saiva Saints) and the *Alvars* (Vaishnava Saints), who spanned a period of more than four centuries from the fourth, is a case in point. For, in terms of numbers, the Brahmans formed too small a percentage of these mystics who fought successfully to stem the spread of Buddhism and Jainism which at one stage threatened to engulf their mother religion. Their motto was “service to humanity”. Such petty considerations as caste and colour did not at all matter to these great souls as they themselves hailed from various strata of society. Some of these saints were potters, fishermen and washermen by “birth”. But all of them were revered by all classes of people. Did not Tirugnana Sambandar, born of Brahman parents, pay obeisance to the other saints of lower castes? They all belonged to one well-knit family “the Lord’s ardent devotees”. It would be of interest to know that there is no mention at all of “caste” in any of the hymns of the *Samayacharyas*—a fact which testifies to the social harmony prevalent in those centuries. It is thus clear that there was no Brahman domination even in the realm of religion in the history of South India.

However, the Brahmans wielded undisputed authority in the ritual world and this was obviously being confused with religious hegemony. The ritual supremacy was conferred on them in recognition of their scholastic attainments by the Tamil Kings and Chieftains who invited them to perform *yagas* for them. In return for this, honours and estates were heaped on them. Verses in some of the Third Sangam literature such as *Aham* (interior), *Puram* (exterior), *Pattu Pattu* (Ten Idylls), and *Padittrupattu* of *Ettuttogai* (Eight Anthologies) vouch for these *yaga* ceremonies and the reciprocal bestowal of honours.<sup>5</sup> According to historians, the Third Sangam



alone which was active during the first three centuries of the Christian era, comes under datable history; and the literature of this period, is the result of the fusion of the Tamil and Aryan cultures. It thus follows that the Tamils of these epochs were not only familiar with the religious notions of the Aryan Brahmans but had assimilated considerably the latter's practices and culture. This is also indicative of the fact that the Brahmans had "lived long enough in Tamilagam from prior to this classic age to familiarise and persuade the Tamils to acquiesce in and partly adopt these Aryan notions".<sup>6</sup> The rituals which they performed painstakingly brought them dividends. Particularly, after the sixteenth century when the State aid was denied to them, it was their rituals and philosophy that gave the Brahmans the necessary stability to preserve their interest in learning.

Their unlimited sway in the ritual world had its bearing on a society permeated by a sense of piety. Having influenced the top brass of the administration by Brahmanical ideas, it was none too difficult for the Brahmans to gain ascendancy over the masses. The devotion of the royalty and the aristocracy to the Brahmans and the consequent sovereignty which the latter enjoyed in the temples with which the Tamil country was studded, made a quasi-sacerdotal caste of them. Native masses believed that the Brahmans alone were ordained to possess knowledge because they were the most supreme in His creation. Having a much fairer skin than the non-Aryans, the Brahmans perhaps became the 'white race' of those days. Though there is no historical evidence to prove it, it is an accepted fact that the caste system was the result of the Aryan Brahmans' invasion of Southern India. For the multitudes of Tamils had known till then no castes but only classes.\*

The Brahmans were wise enough to evolve a new pattern of caste in the South which was different from the original *Chaturvarnya*\*\* of the northern part of India.\*\*\* The socio-cultural profile

\* The whole Tamil population lived in the five natural regions with their distinctive features namely: *kurinchi* (mountainous regions), *mullai* (forest region), *marutam* (agricultural region), *neital* (coastal region) and *palai* (desert region).

\*\* *Varna* is Sanskrit for caste. It was the fourfold classification of society into *Brahmana* (priest), *Kshatriya* or *Rajanya* (warrior-ruler), *Vaisya* (merchant) and *Sudra* (servant). Those outside this structure were categorised as Untouchables, (*Purusha Suktam*).

\*\*\*K.M. Panikkar dismisses this fourfold division as a sociological fiction. According to him there was no Kshatriya caste anywhere in India in historical

of the Tamil country being different from that of the Gangetic core region, a simpler system of the caste was introduced here. There was only a tripartite division of the entire populace in which the *Kshatriya* (Ruler) and the *Vaisya* (Merchant) castes had no place. There existed only the Brahmans and the non-Brahmans, the latter comprising the higher and lower castes. At the lowest rung of the social order were the *Panchamas* or the fifth caste as they were unjustly called. In the Madras Presidency these persons numbering some ten millions were also called *Pariahs*. They were denied certain religious and social privileges which were usurped and perpetuated by the higher castes as their prerogative. They were out-castes and untouchables \* whose shadow, leave alone their touch, was deemed a pollution by the higher castes. The untouchables were dominated more by the Dravidians or non-Brahmans who comprised various groups of Hindu castes which were as exclusive as the Brahmans and were largely antagonistic to one another.

In this trichomatization of society the Brahmans were the only *Dwijas* (twice born). However, since *varna* itself came to the south comparatively late, the system was not rigid initially. The Brahmans occupied the vanguard of the system and this was whole-heartedly accepted by the rest of the population. Their intellectual superiority was willingly acknowledged. Their decree was honoured. The non-Brahmans bowed to the laws of Manu without protest. As a rule, the Brahmans also proved worthy of the trust reposed in them by the members of the other castes.

The *Varna-Dharma* introduced by them had not adversely affected the traditional life style of the Tamils. "In the languages, literatures (sic) and institutions of the South, there has survived much more pre-Aryan India than anywhere else".<sup>7</sup> Though Tamil, the mother of the Dravidian languages, was influenced by the increasing inflow of Sanskrit, it was never sub-merged by the latter. The people of the South were speaking only the Dravidian

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times. The *Vaisyas* were a caste and all the other castes recognised them to be so. The Sudras—a miscellaneous group also existed. (*Hindu Society at crossroads*, pp. 7–11)

\*In April 1920, this debasing nomenclature was superseded by the official designation "Adi-Dravidas" (Gilbert Slater, *Southern India—Its political and economic problems*, p.69). Later Gandhiji re-christened all untouchables as *Harijans* (children of God).



languages. The Dravidian elements remained salient in the culture that emerged from the intermingling of the two streams.

Though the fair skinned Aryan Brahmans in their anxiety to preserve intact their racial purity seemed to have enforced the most rigid laws of caste, which meant originally colour, their inter-breeding with certain pre-Aryan groups cannot be ruled out. It is highly probable that the Brahmans married the high-caste Vellalas even as the Nambudiris married the Nair women. Inter-marriages between the two groups—the pre-Aryan Vellalas and the Aryan Brahmans have been supported by the following factors.

The Vellalas who had an unquenchable propensity to emulate the Brahmans adopted the Brahmanical style of living. They had many things in common with the Brahmans rather than with the majority non-Brahmans. The Vellalas of Tinnevely and Tondaimandalam, for instance, were almost on par with the Brahmans, scrupulously observing their customs and strictly adhering to their orthodox way of living. They had no aversion to Sanskrit and some of them even learnt it avidly. They spoke Tamil with a Brahman accent. They were generally as fair skinned as the Brahmans. There were also Brahmans who were very dark in complexion. The Vellala men had the traditional tuft on the head, wore (diamond) earrings called *Kadukkan* and were clean shaven like the Brahmans. Another striking similarity was that the Vellalas tonsured their widows as the Brahmans did. In fact they were Brahmans in all but name. They also abstained from meat-eating out of respect for cattle. A great number of sub-castes of north Indian Brahmans are still meat-eaters. It is not improbable that the Aryan Brahmans who came to the south abjured the habit and became strict vegetarians thanks to the influence of the native Dravidian vegetarians.\*

### *Caste rigidity:*

The reification of the caste system in Tamil society cannot be

\*“Beef-eating was a normal article of contemporary Brahman diet as appears from *Atharva Veda* on the necessity of giving away sterile cows to the mendicant Brahmans who could only have eaten them”. (D. D. Kosambi—An introduction to the study of Indian History, pp. 128–29). Brahmans in the Northern India in general are not strict vegetarians.

It is also said that influenced by the *Ahimsa* theory of the Buddhists and Jains the Brahmans abandoned meat eating to regain the confidence of the masses and to revive their faith in Hinduism.

precisely dated. It is also not known how the three fold division of castes split into countless sub-castes threatening the very solidarity of the Hindu society. These developments must have begun only after the tenth century. We have seen earlier that the *Samayacharyas* who appeared on the social scene up to the tenth century had no sectarian inclinations. The father of Poompavai, a non-Brahman by birth, proposed his daughter to the Brahman Tirugnana Sambandar as a matter of course and Sambandar rejected it on grounds other than caste. This instance proves that marriages across caste divisions were not unusual.

The *Samayacharyas* who stemmed the tide of the traditions of the heterodox religions namely Jainism and Buddhism and helped the revival of Vedic traditions appealed to the masses transcending the caste barriers. The Vedic traditions in turn paved the way for the revival of the *Sanatana* tradition. The subsequent socio-historical aberrations facilitated the gradual hardening of the caste structure “until South Indian Brahmans became even stricter in ritual observances and South Indian untouchables became even more debased than those of the north”.<sup>8</sup> This shameful degradation of humanity for which no parallel could be found in slavery, ancient or modern, proved to be the bane of the land.<sup>9</sup> Caste provided a convenient wedge for all proselytising movements native or foreign on the Indian soil. The European evangelists making inroads into Hindu society, happily exploited the pernicious influence of caste, chiefly in the case of the untouchables. Whether the latter were treated on terms of equality with the caste Hindu converts after their conversion to Christianity is a debatable issue.

Like the Greeks who called all non-Greeks barbarians, the South Indian Brahmans began to look down upon all non-Brahmans as ‘Sudras’. All Sudras were untouchables to them and were consequently placed at an unmeasurable distance from them. This state of affairs persisted and prevailed well into the colonial period. An English visitor to the Presidency has expressed her concern over this matter: “. . . genius in fact has no stimulus, and enterprise little award, where men are reduced to the state of passive machines; and where the spirit of emulation, one of the greatest levers that keeps the intellectual world in motion, is destroyed by the law which decrees that the son can follow the occupation of the father”.<sup>10</sup>

By virtue of their mastery of the Vedic lore the Brahmans made



priestly functions their close preserve. The actual worship of the idols was carried out by the *Gurukkals* in the Siva temples and *Paancharatra Bhattacharyas* or *Vaikhaanasa Archakas* in the Vishnu temples.\* Both the temple priests were Brahmans. The *Naivedya* (food offerings) were prepared by *Paricharakas* who were also Brahmans. At the time of *Arati* (waving of light and lighted camphor before the idol) again, Brahmans called *Adhyapakas* recited the Vedas. Verses from *Tiruvaimozhi* and *Devaram* in Tamil were also sung, the first by Vaishnava Brahmans in Vishnu temples and the second by *Oduvars* in the Siva temples. All but the last, namely, the *oduvar* of the *Pandaram* caste which was graded as “low”, were Brahmans. Even among the devotees only Brahmans had access to the *sanctum-sanctorum* of any temple. That the *Oduvar* recited the devotional hymns of *Devaram* outside the *sanctum sanctorum* leads naturally to the deduction that Sanskrit was accorded greater sanctity than Tamil after the tenth century. Perhaps a little elaboration is necessary here. Though the devotional songs of both the *Nayanmars* and *Alwars* were divine prayers registering the outpourings of human beings dedicated to the Almighty, the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*—a compilation of 4000 hymns rendered by the Alwars—was accorded a higher status. This might be because they were the verses of the Vedas rendered in Tamil by the Alwars. The *Tiruvaimozhi* of Nammalwar which formed part of the *Prabandham* was the very essence of *Sama Veda*. It would be recited only by the Brahmans in the Vaishnava temples. Two inferences can be drawn from this: (1) *Tiruvaimozhi* enjoyed a more exalted status in the Vaishnava shrines than *Devaram* did in the temples dedicated to Siva; (2) since the *Devaram* hymnists were rightly anxious that their verses extolling the virtues of *Saivism* in dulcit Tamil should be known to all without exception, they were made to be sung by the *Oduvars* outside the *sanctum* of the temple. Temple work apart, the Brahmans also officiated as *purohits* in the household ceremonies of Hindus including non-Brahmans. Curiously enough, the *Panchangakaras* or *purohits* who officiated in the ceremonies of non-Brahman households were accorded a status inferior to those who officiated in Brahman households!

The native inhabitants of the Tamil region who deified the Brahmans were also equally responsible for inculcating in the latter the belief that they were the ordained dispensers of divine favour

\* Vaishnava shrines follow either *Paancharatra* or *Vaikhaanasa Sastras*.

through rituals and sacrifices. Having deified them the non-Brahmans meekly submitted to the degrading distinctions imposed on them by the expounders of the Vedas who arrogated to themselves all *sacerdotal* powers. It was an established belief, for instance, that they could obtain religious merit by feeding Brahman priests or educating Brahman boys. By being thus a party, inadvertently though, to perpetuating a “pernicious priesthood, the non-Brahmans betrayed generations unborn, when they accepted the superiority of the Brahmans and for themselves a position of inferiority. . . .”

Their adoration of the Brahmans continued even after a majority of the latter had ceased to be men of sterling character; abandoned conveniently the plain-living and high thinking of their forefathers; idly quoted the code of Manu to legitimise their superior status in society; mangled and misinterpreted the scriptures to keep the Sudras under perpetual bondage; and brought many inconsiderate injunctions against those they deemed inferior to them. The Sudras were subjected to innumerable indignities such as the denial of the right to study the Vedas; denial of exchanging social graces with higher castes on terms of equality; and denial of even the sight of upper castes during supper time without causing pollution to the supper. Members who became polluted had to undergo purificatory rites of varying complexities before re-joining their caste group fellows. Not only that: Whereas a Brahman criminal got away with a lighter punishment, a non-Brahman was visited with dire consequences if he committed a crime especially against Brahmans. *Brahmahatya* (Brahman-killing) was the worst of all offences. However, the widely held belief that high caste people were vested with the right to kill the untouchables on the spot if they came in the former's way, is not substantiated by any known historical evidence. Such false notions only helped the conceited among the westerners to slander our fair land. Had the high caste men resorted to such genocide, the untouchables would have been wiped off the face of the earth centuries ago. And brutality in any form was revolting to the Brahmanical culture that evolved in South India.

This social pyramid with the Brahmans occupying the apex enjoying hereditary rights and privileges incidental to caste hierarchy remained in tact for millenia thanks to historical inertia. The structure was attacked only in the 1910s.

What were the causes of the challenge to the social pre-eminence of the Brahmans in the second decade of this century? There were two distinct factors which led to the undermining of the Brahmans'



status in the caste hierarchy in the traditional Indian society. One was their abandoning the way of life prescribed for them in the *Sastras* by means of which they had hitherto legitimised their superior position in society. The other was their succumbing to the temptations of the western values and ways of life in utter disregard of whatever they had hitherto held as sacred. The Brahmans' pursuance of non-priestly avocations in life was regarded by non-Brahmans as a betrayal of trust. The Brahmans were accused of shoving their *kula Dharma* into the background and plunging before all else into the material life of the west leaving the other castes "to take care of the *Varna Dharma*".<sup>11</sup>

What necessitated the Brahmans to shirk their *Kula Dharma*?

When the British assumed sovereignty in India they were greatly in need of personnel to man their administrative services. They set about recruiting a corps of suitable individuals for discharging public duties. They conducted small examinations to enlist candidates for the offices and a knowledge of English was *sine qua non* for entry into the services. The Brahmans, left high and dry due to the withdrawal of royal patronage, sagaciously made a virtue of the necessity and took to learning English for professional advancement. Owing to their inheritance of literary traditions through generations, the traditional learning class easily and quickly took to the learning of English. As a result, the Brahmans became prominent in the westernising sectors of Indian society. They first acquired a virtual monopoly of all the subordinate public services in the Madras Presidency and, in course of time, of all higher posts which the British Government in India gradually threw open to Indians. The Brahmans thus predominated in all the new professions fostered by western education. They showed a very special aptitude for the legal profession. "South India has always been the home of brilliant lawyers. Bengal has challenged it by producing one or two outstanding geniuses, but she could not command at any one time, the galaxy of talent which always seemed to be available at Madras", was the glorious tribute paid to the legal profession by *The Hindustan Times*.<sup>12</sup> After seizing the professional opportunities offered by English education, the Brahmans turned to the political arena also and dominated the political scene in Madras Presidency during the turn of this century. The western educated "Madrasi" Brahmans played a significant role in the Indian National Congress. They constituted a politically articulate section of the Indian intelligentsia.

Thus the Brahmans added political supremacy and official influence under the British to the social and ritual hegemony which they already enjoyed from time immemorial. In other words, their monopoly of English education was almost as perfect as their monopoly of Vedic learning and culture. The fact that the British *Raj* did not question or curtail their hereditary supremacy in the ritual and social world of Hinduism, prompted the shrewd Brahmans to derive a double benefit—the social supremacy inherited from his ritual status and material prosperity from the British regime.

The Brahmans constituted a vast majority of the graduates of the Madras University. The recipients of the Bachelor of Arts Degree awarded by the University of Madras from 1870 to 1918, were predominantly Brahmans: their percentage during these years had never been below 67, while that of non-Brahmans never above 22. The Indian Christians, Mohammadans and Europeans accounted for 11 per cent.<sup>13</sup> The Brahmans constituted a percentage of about 74, 71 and 74 respectively of the graduates in law, engineering and teaching.<sup>14</sup> Ere long, they occupied all the top echelons of the administration making themselves indispensable to the alien rulers of India. Out of the 16 Deputy Collectors selected by open competition between 1893 and 1905, 15 were Brahmans.<sup>15</sup> The sixteenth successful candidate who hailed from the West Coast was also said to have had more of Brahman blood in him.<sup>16</sup> In the second half of the 1910s, there were 4 Brahman High Court Judges, 1 Brahman Advocate General, 1 Brahman Government Pleader, 1 Brahman member of the Governor's Executive Council, 1 Brahman Home Secretary, 1 Brahman Secretary to the Board of Revenue and 1 Brahman Vice-Chancellor in the Presidency.<sup>17</sup> It was this entry into and monopoly of public life by the Brahmans that provoked the non-Brahmans to question the former's ritual supremacy also which had hitherto been accepted without demur. The non-Brahmans said: "In temples they are the officiating priests, in houses they are the *purohits* (family priests), and in offices they are the officers. Thus Brahmans are found everywhere".<sup>18</sup>

It is pertinent here to refer to the general impression prevalent in those days that whenever the Governor took an Indian Member to his Executive Council, the choice had invariably been from the Brahmans of the City of Madras. This was, however, not the whole truth. For, the very first Indian to be appointed to this exalted position was the Maharaja Sir Venkata Swatchelapati Ranga Rao



Bahadur (1862–1927), the eleventh ruler of Bobbili,\* a Telugu non-Brahman who was also known for his prejudices against Brahmans.\*\* He resigned in January 1911 within a year of his appointment for personal reasons. His successors V. Krishnaswamy Iyer, P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer, and P. Rajagopalachari were all Brahmans. When a second member was added to the Governor's Executive Council under the Reforms Act of 1919, the appointment was not confined to Brahmans alone. Out of the 5 who held this office, namely Mohammad Habib-ul-lah, K. Srinivasa Iyengar, C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, Mohammad Usman and M. Krishnan Nair only 2 were Brahmans.

The Brahmans were no doubt the first to seize the opportunities for advancement offered by the British regime. But they did not deliberately prevent the rest of the Hindu society from availing themselves of these privileges and benefits. Under the British dispensation, all Indians were entitled to receive western education, to qualify themselves for a share of employment in the public services and compete on equal terms for the same, regardless of all religious and caste differences. But the leading non-Brahman castes were comparatively unprepared to take advantage of the new social situation engendered by the introduction of English education. Still feeling committed to the old feudal order, this affluent class was unwilling to abandon its traditional ways of life. A Director of Public Instruction asked in 1867, "where are the native gentry who should have been taking advantage of the facilities, so generously offered by the British?"<sup>19</sup> But there was nothing unnatural about an opulent lot not feeling the necessity either to learn an alien language or to take to unfamiliar occupations.

Then there were the martial groups such as the Marawars noted for their ferocity and bravery who resented British imperialism

\* Situated about 250 kilometers from Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.

\*\* This appointment was made in March 1910. The Maharaja had already represented the landholders of South India in the Madras Legislative Council for 14 years from 1896. The news of his appointment to the Executive Council of Governor Arthur Lawley was received throughout the Presidency with disappointment and dismay. Almost all the newspapers in the Presidency barring the *Andhra Prakasika*, *Desabhimani* and the ones owned by the Anglo-Indians, expressed surprise at the "strange and audacious" appointment by the Government of a man who had no pretensions to be styled "a man of high education and modern culture". (*The Hindu*, 9 March 1910).

from its inception. They had no admiration for anything British. The Poligars\* who belonged to this class and who were well-known for their military prowess were the first Indians to openly oppose the British domination.

The Chettiars—the opulent merchant caste and the Banias—the Marwari traders and money-lenders (Sowcars) of northern India who settled in the south during the heyday of the East India Company were also not prepared to give up their hereditary calling. Thus the landed aristocracy, the warrior class and the well-to-do commercial classes not to speak of the Submerged Tenth, failed to take to English education offered in the Presidency. The Brahmans, on the other hand, avidly availed of the opportunity. The criticism that the non-Brahmans were deliberately denied educational facilities is off the mark.

The industrialisation of India undertaken by the British opened avenues of urban employment for the rural masses of the lowest strata of the Indian Society. Thus both the Brahmans and the lower castes underwent displacement from the traditional occupations. The upper caste non-Brahmans found themselves left high and dry in a truncated social fabric. The old feudal order was also slowly crumbling. It was then that the landed gentry awakened to the need for western education. By the turn of the century, there emerged many English educated non-Brahmans who were no less intelligent and capable than the Brahmans. The Mudaliars, Pillais, Naidus, Chettiars, Komattis and Nairs who were making rapid strides in the field of education were steadily fighting their way to the vanguard of westernisation.<sup>20</sup>

But the employment market in the westernised sector had already reached a near saturation point. The late comers to the race for office could not outwit the formidable Brahmans, who had already entrenched themselves in all profitable fields. The judicial, educational and public departments were all overmanned by the Brahmans, out of proportion to their size which was scarcely 3 per cent of the total population of the Presidency in the beginning of this century.\*\* They had first entrenched themselves in the top echelons of all occupations in the westernised sector. Subsequently they had inducted their own kinsmen at all lower levels except for menial

\*The notable chiefs were Kattabomman of Panchalankurichi (Tinnevely) and the Marudu brothers of Sivaganga (Ramanathapuram).

\*\*Out of the total population of 41,405,404 Brahmans numbered only 1,221,907.



tasks. The upper caste non-Brahmans who awoke belatedly to their socio-historical predicament were alarmed at this state of affairs. They could ill-afford to disregard any longer the autocracy of a minority caste in the vast Presidency of Madras, in whose political development their own influence was nil.

### *Brahman dominated Congress*

Animosity against the Brahmans did not however surface till 1910. For instance, in the early years of the Congress when it had been a stronghold of the Brahmans, the British bureaucracy tried to persuade the leaders of the high caste non-Brahmans to keep away from it and if possible to denounce the Congress as inimical to their interests. But the high caste non-Brahmans ignored it because in their opinion the caste-Hindus as a whole were one of the worst affected by the British conquest. The locally influential Rajas and Zamindars, who were deprived of their power and properties by the British Government, generally belonged to this category. The non-Brahmans of the lower castes felt even more obligated to the Congress. The non-Brahmans were convinced that the "*raison d'être* of the Congress was the intense poverty of the people and the measures they put forward to relieve such poverty concerned the non-Brahmans more than the Brahmans and that the non-Brahman higher castes, therefore, stood to gain from its success more than any others".<sup>21</sup> Again as late as 1907 when the question of communal representation was referred to some leading non-Brahmans for their opinion, men of great stature like the Maharaja of Bobbili (the elder) who was known to have cherished a deep dislike for Brahmans, Rajaratna Mudaliar who later became an active leader of the Non-Brahman movement, and the Raja of Kollengode registered their opposition to it. Their view was eventually endorsed by the Madras Government.<sup>22</sup>

Simmering dislike of the Brahmans manifested itself openly only from 1910. It emanated first from the British bureaucrats. The Collectors of Bellary and Madras invited applications in June 1910 only from non-Brahmans while advertising for some vacancies in Fort St. George.<sup>23</sup> The administration was strongly condemned by the public for this act of patronising certain sections of the people at the cost of "efficiency and honesty". The next step in this direction was the strong opposition voiced by European administrators like Alexander Cardew and M. Hammick to the decision to hold

the Public Service Commission examinations in Indian centres also.<sup>24</sup> They apprehended that such an arrangement would result in the monopolisation of the service by the Brahmans to the exclusion of all other communities, particularly the non-Brahmans. The idea behind it was that hitherto only the well to do Indians, whether Brahmans or non-Brahmans were able to make it to London and take the examinations. If they were held in India more Brahmans than non-Brahmans would be able to enter the civil service for even the poor among the Brahmans had a penchant for learning.

When the initiative to end “Brahman Oppression” came from the British civilians, some of the discontented non-Brahmans readily responded to it. The distrust and suspicion against the Brahmans found a clear expression in the evidence tendered by some of the non-Brahman leaders before the Public Service Commission\* when the latter visited Madras in 1913. There were bitter complaints of ill-treatment meted out to the non-Brahman Government servants by their Brahman bosses who nagged and stifled them. It was averred that the Brahman officials often combined to drive out the non-Brahman employee “either by making his life miserable or by turning against him the European superior to whose ear they had easy access.”<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, the Congress was becoming the butt of all criticism for being singularly sectarian and sectional. It was pointed out that from the year 1910, the delegates attending the Congress sessions from the Madras Presidency were mostly Brahmans. The Madras Mahajana Sabha and the Madras Provincial Congress Committee were dominated by the Brahmans. Their office bearers were all Brahmans. The twenty ninth session of the Indian National Congress held at Madras in 1914 only added to the discontent of the non-Brahmans. Out of the 748 delegates from Madras a sizeable number were Brahmans.<sup>26</sup> Some non-Brahmans considered this preponderance of Brahmans among the delegates a gross betrayal of their interests. Rumour was set afloat for the first time now that following in the footsteps of their Muslim brethren who had

\* It is an irony of history that a Brahman was instrumental in constituting the Public Service Commission before which evidences against Brahmans were tendered. It was formed on a motion by one of the illustrious representatives of the Presidency in the Imperial Legislative Council N. Subba Rao. His speech coupled with the agitation in Madras and other Provinces paved the way for the appointment of the Public Service Commission (A. Ramaswami Mudaliar’s speech, *Madras Legislative Council Proceedings*, 09-03-1921, Vol.I, Part II p. 723).



secured separate electorates by the Indian Councils Act of 1909, the non-Brahman Hindus would form their own organisation to represent their own interests as against those of the Brahmans.<sup>27</sup> The spokesmen of the Muslim League expressed their readiness to fraternise with non-Brahmans and pursue common objects in concert.

Opposition to the Congress snowballed with the announcement of the names of the members constituting the Provincial Committee of the Congress. There were loud protests against the exclusion of stalwarts like C. Karunakara Menon and P. Kesava Pillai and “a whole regiment of non-Brahmans who are not in any way inferior either to the Triplicane Clique or the Mylapore Cabal”.\*<sup>28</sup>

There was only one non-Brahman out of the fifteen gentlemen elected from the Presidency to represent it on the All India Congress Committee, which being the executive of the Congress, had a decisive voice in all crucial matters. In other words, 93 per cent of the seats on the Committee allotted to the Madras Presidency were filled by the Brahmans who formed but a fringe of the total population of the Presidency.

The first concrete step to combat the Brahmans was the founding in 1914 of the “Dravidian Home” by C. Natesa Mudaliar, a doctor by profession and a prominent figure in Madras politics. As the name implied it was a hostel exclusively for non-Brahman\*\* students. It was intended to help the non-Brahman students who faced hard-

\* The lawyers, administrators, educators and entrepreneurs who began to show interest in national resurgence and political revival towards the end of the last century being mostly residents of Mylapore, this part of Madras supplied the sinews of power to the movement of life in the city and the mofussils. By the beginning of this century, Mylapore was a force to reckon with and the motive force comprising it was known as the “Mylapore Set”. It was led first by V. Krishnaswamy Iyer, P. R. Sundara Iyer, V. C. Desikachari and T. R. Ramachandra Iyer and later by V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, S. Subrahmanya Iyer and C. R. Pattabhirama Iyer. Possessing as it did the necessary skills and a good command over the English language, this group of Moderates captured all the seats of power and influence. It had also control, in a sense, over the Madras Provincial branch of the Congress. But the complaint that whenever the Governor took an Indian mentor to his Executive Council, the choice had been from the “Mylapore Set” is baseless. The other group must be the “Egmore clique” which comprised the extremists as the nationalists were called. Acting as a counterweight to the “Mylapore Set”, the group consisted of both Brahmans and non-Brahmans. The most prominent among them were the Tamil Brahmans Kasturiranga Iyengar, A. Rangaswamy Iyengar and T. Rangachari. Initially it included C. Sankaran Nair and T. M. Nair. This group was, however, not as powerful and influential as the “Mylapore Set”.

\*\* It is not known whether Adi-Dravidas and non-Hindus were admitted.

ships in securing accommodation in the hostels in Madras on account of caste barriers. Though it functioned for only two years, it was an important milestone in the annals of the non-Brahman Movement which was to take deep roots in the Tamil soil.

The second step in the battle against Brahman domination was the establishment of the "Dravidian Association" which was also the creation of Natesa Mudaliar. It was the fore-runner of the Justice Party, its declared aspiration being the ushering in of a Dravidian State under the British *Raj*, which would be a "government of, by and for the non-Brahmans".<sup>29</sup> The Raja of Panagal and T. Madhavan Nair were elected respectively, its President and Vice President. As a founder of the Association, Natesa Mudaliar was "At Home" to the non-Brahman graduates every year to infuse "a spirit of healthy revolt against the Brahmans and a spirit of self-respect in themselves".<sup>30</sup>

#### *Launching of the Non-Brahman Movement :*

To the now little remembered Natesa Mudaliar who was the originator of the non-Brahman Movement goes also the credit of bringing together the two inveterate foes — Pitti Theagaraya Chetty, an industrial magnate and the "Father of the Corporation" of Madras, and T. M. Nair, the surgeon turned politician and publicist. P. T. Chetty was the first elected President of the Madras Corporation and was a great friend of Brahmans until 1915. He who ruled the Corporation for a quarter of a century by getting himself re-elected several times came under severe pressure in 1915. The two prominent Brahman leaders C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer and G. A. Natesan, who were elected that year to the Corporation began an attack on the old bases of that body. J. C. Molony of the Indian Civil Service who had known Madras rather intimately as President of the Corporation for 6 years from 1914 writes: "Pitti Theagaraya Chetty was the Father of the Madras Corporation, the Nestor among his Fellow Councillors. At the time I became President he led a block known as 'the northern councillors': his and their chief function in life was the criticism of the Corporation executive and opposition to all innovation".<sup>31</sup>

P. T. Chetty never joined the Congress. Frank, outspoken and vehement, he openly declared that his objective was to eliminate the "political Brahman who was keeping us down and crushing us to death". His hatred for the Brahmans was thus political rather



than racial. T.M. Nair who was a medico of Edinburgh became prominent as an ENT specialist.<sup>32</sup> He had done professional work at some of the reputed hospitals in London. He was a full time surgeon rendering admirable service to wounded soldiers in Mombaza, Zanzibar, the Persian Gulf and also in Europe at the out-break of the First World War.<sup>33</sup> In March 1915 he resigned from the *Hospital Ship*\* having felt that public interest must take precedence over private affairs and drifted away from surgery to politics. He became an ardent congressite and was very closely associated with Brahmans.\*\*He had a great regard for Kasturiranga Iyengar and was an intimate friend of C. Vijayaraghavachari.<sup>34</sup>

There was no love lost between P. T. Chetty and T. M. Nair. At the City Corporation, they were ever at loggerheads. When Chetty spoke against the Corporation's Sewage Farm, Nair opposed him stoutly and called the attack on the Sewage, which posed a menace to public health, "a hollow and insincere affair".<sup>35</sup> The one person who consistently supported Chetty in this campaign was K. C. Desikachari, a Brahman.<sup>36</sup> Almost disgusted at the verbal duel between P. T. Chetty and T. M. Nair, G. A. Natesan once remarked at a general meeting of the Corporation "What have we to do with the quarrel between P. T. Chetty and T. M. Nair?"<sup>37</sup>

Nair also organised a series of agitations against the corrupt policies of the Corporation of Madras and declared a war on Chetty. His tirade against the latter for allowing free supply of water from the Municipal water works to the huge tank of the Parthasarathy temple at Triplicane on the ground that it was a waste of the city water and city money, proved fatal to his civic career. The offended Chetty brought forth Nair's defeat in the Corporation elections of 1913.<sup>38</sup> Since Nair was in the good books of the British, they deftly came to his rescue and nominated him to that body. But his attacks on the old bases of the Corporation did not have the same effect thereafter.<sup>39</sup>

\*Named the *Madras*, the Hospital Ship—the only one of its kind in Eastern waters at that time—was equipped and maintained by the proceeds of the "Madras War Fund" raised through voluntary subscriptions.

\*\*Nair hardly ever referred to the Brahman Problem when he tendered evidence before the Public Service Commission in 1912. His evidence was used by Brahmans to prove that Alexander Cardew's evidence on Brahman Supremacy "did not mean that non-Brahmans were communally prejudiced". (*The Hindu* 5 April 1913 cited in Washbrook, p. 85)

But for Natesa Mudaliar, Nair and Chetty between whom there was little in common, might have remained life long enemies, ever nurturing the mutual repulsion each had for the other. Mudaliar, with his prophetic vision of the Movement that was to shake the Presidency, succeeded in bringing about a *rapprochement* between them at a conference at the Victoria Hall on 20 November 1916. This reconciliation is significant inasmuch as it shaped the course of the history of the Presidency of Madras. At this conference, it was resolved to start a Joint Stock Company called the South Indian People's Association (SIPA) as a forum to ventilate the grievances of the non-Brahman community and to demand safeguards to protect their political interests.

Chetty and Nair became fast friends thereafter, both throwing themselves with characteristic energy into the task of releasing the non-Brahmans from the Congress controlled by an "irresponsible bureaucracy of Brahmans". What these two men achieved for the growth of their Movement was fantastic. And in the crusade of their hatred against the Brahmans each excelled the other. If Chetty wanted to destroy only the political Brahmans, Nair's activities suggested that he was out to wipe off the entire Brahman caste from the Presidency. He played a "desperado" with P.T. Chetty as his close friend and coadjutor.<sup>40</sup>

C. Karunakara Menon, a veteran journalist and patriot was another non-Brahman who prognosticated the launching of the non-Brahman Movement through a spate of letters sponsoring the non-Brahman cause published in 1915 in *The Indian Patriot*, which he edited. These letters, numbering 21 in all, conveyed the aspirations of certain caste groups which he deemed should form the principal aims of the non-Brahman Movement. According to one letter "... unlike the Brahmans who act in concert and realise the importance of education, the non-Brahmans, mesmerised by the strictness of Manu are the victims of their own sense of inferiority. If they are ever to become important in the public life of the Madras Presidency, they must organise a movement to unite the Dravidians. . . ." <sup>41</sup>

The general tendency to-day is to trace the origin of the non-Brahman Movement and the Justice Party to the SIPA whose birth, growth and achievements are ascribed to the triumvirate comprising P.T. Chetty, T.M. Nair and P. Ramarayaningar (later the Raja of Panagal). "To canonize any more name and to add to that galaxy would be condemned as a political heresy and a profane



attempt to defile the sanctity of the dead triumvirate”<sup>42</sup> While P. T. Chetty and T.M. Nair are regarded as the founders of the SIPA, Ramarayaningar, the wealthy Zamindar from Chittoor\* is credited with having fostered it. But there are evidences to prove that the last one did not, in the beginning, favour the “storm” that was brewing in the Presidency in 1916.

The triumvirate could not have been actuated by any love of their castemen whose political, social and economic advancement they professed to strive for. Prior to 1916 none of them showed any reformist zeal. On the contrary, they were pro-Brahmans and were associated mostly with Brahmans. They were scarcely interested in caste politics. It was the electoral defeats they suffered at the hands of the Brahman Home Rulers that caused them to raise the anti-Brahman cry. The founding of the SIPA was, therefore, a reaction to the Brahman-dominated Home Rule Movement which was gaining rapid support throughout the Presidency. As seen earlier, P. T. Chetty who was ruling the roost in the Corporation of Madras with his allies for well nigh a quarter of a century, was defeated by the Brahmans in 1915. The Raja of Panagal was defeated in the election to the Imperial Legislative Council at Delhi by K. V. Rangaswamy Iyengar, a Zamindar from Sri Rangam in Trichinopoly and a son of a former Legislative Councillor. T. M. Nair suffered a defeat at the hands of V. S. Srinivasa Sastri in the election to the Imperial Legislative Council from the Madras Legislative Council. The two representatives thus elected from the Presidency were V. S. Srinivasa Sastri and B. N. Sarma, both Brahmans. This was Nair’s second reverse, the first one being his defeat in the first elections to the Imperial Legislative Council in 1910 at the hands of V. Krishnaswamy Iyer. Nair charged the non-official Members of the Madras Legislature with breach of faith since they had not kept up their promise to vote for him. Though the defeats of these prominent non-Brahman leaders in general contributed to aggravate the anti-Brahman feeling, the defeat of Nair by V. S. Srinivasa Sastri in particular, “supplied the immediate impetus to the formation of a non-Brahman party”.<sup>43</sup>

Prior to the election of 1916, Nair was anti-Sastri rather than anti-Brahman as is borne out by the contents of his letters to C. Vijayaraghavachari. “I hear Subba Rao is likely to withdraw. . . . You must see that the votes promised to Subba Rao by

\* Now in Andhra Pradesh.

non-Andhra members are secured for you. It may not be possible to secure them for me. It is sufficient if you secure them. . . . Ramanujachari has promised one vote to Subba Rao. Now you must see that that vote does not go to Sastri. Please secure both Ramanujachari's votes for yourself. Your Salem Narasimha Iyer is very likely to give one vote to Sastri. You must try and prevent that and get both the Salem men's votes for yourself".<sup>44</sup> Filled with despair he wrote another letter 3 days later stating that he had "only 4 or 5 definite promises" outside the European and the nominated groups.<sup>45</sup> It was thus evident that Nair himself was unsure of his success. The other notable defeats in these elections were those of C. Vijayaraghavachari and P. Kesava Pillai. The Raja of Panagal a defeated candidate wrote "I do feel disappointed that you (P. K. Pillai) and C. Vijayaraghavachari are out of the Council. Both of you rendered great service to the country".<sup>46</sup>

Nair perceived his defeat as a personal betrayal by his Brahman friends in the Madras Legislature. It was construed as non-Brahmans' defeat. He turned rabidly anti-Brahman thereafter. As a matter of fact Nair began his campaign against Brahmans even on the eve of this election when his chances of entering the Imperial Council became bleak. That he fought with all powers at his command at the eleventh hour to bring about the defeat of Vijayaraghavachari himself as a "counter measure" for supposed disloyalty on the latter's part to him was evident from these lines of Vijayaraghavachari: ". . . Machiavellian strategems are there but I did not believe that . . . Dr. Nair with my affectionate and pure friendship for him for a quarter of a century would so easily believe stories against me and act on the report too, all without reference."<sup>47</sup>

From the time of Nair's second defeat, the non-Brahman leaders of the Presidency began to read a pattern of systematic Brahman domination into the vicissitudes of the electoral outcomes. They overlooked the defeats that some prominent Brahmans themselves suffered. Their endeavours to enter the Central legislatures and gain political leadership having proved infructuous, the influential, wealthy and high-caste non-Brahmans made a grim determined bid to wrest certain rights for themselves from the Government. The general cry of the low-caste non-Brahmans for more opportunities for education and employment came in very handy for these defeated and discontented group of non-Brahman leaders. The genuine grievances of the majority castes were politicised to such an extent by the disgruntled caste Hindus that non-Brahman



leaders were catapulted to eminence; and the upper castes were united much to the disadvantage of the Congress which had become a synonym for the Brahman. This united opposition to what they perceived as Brahman-dominated Congress had lasted about two decades.

In December 1916, SIPA under the stewardship of Chetty published a Manifesto addressed to "The Non-Brahman gentlemen throughout the Presidency". It was their first salvo in launching the Non-Brahman Movement. The SIPA furnished accurate statistical information in the Manifesto to back up the claims of the non-Brahmans to greater participation in the political life of the Presidency. The Manifesto pointed out that all but one of the 12 Fellows elected by the Graduates' constituency to the Legislative Council between 1907 and 1916 were Brahmans. It added that the same was the case with regard to the Imperial and local Legislative Councils as well as the Municipal bodies elections to which were controlled by the "rigidly exclusive caste".<sup>48</sup>

Enumerating the handicaps of the non-Brahmans in different realms such as public services, public bodies, education etc. the Manifesto demanded "progressive political development" and not "unauthorised constitution making". It also demanded self-government with equal distribution of powers and not caste rule. Dwelling at length on the lot of the non-Brahmans, the Manifesto stated that if a "fair-minded ruler" like Governor Pentland attempted to correct the inequality arising out of Brahman domination by having recourse to nominations of individuals from unrepresented communities, the Brahman Press condemned him. This charge against the Press had no substance as Pentland's exercise of his power of nomination of non-official members to the legislative councils in 1913 and 1916 surprised many among the public including some non-Brahmans.<sup>49</sup> Pentland's nominations, barring a few, were not traceable to any intelligent principle. That they merely served to add to the voting strength of the Government was clear from the nominations of the Prince of Arcot and the Archbishop of Madras who hardly ever spoke in the legislature but helped the Government during voting time to defeat non-official motions.

There could be no two opinions about the need to start an association for the non-Brahmans to safeguard their interests. Their grievances had necessarily to find expression through articles in the newspapers and through interpellations addressed to the

Legislative Council. They owned no press or organisation to voice their feelings. It was time they asserted their rightful place in a society where they were numerically superior. Their demand for a share in the Presidency's administration in proportion to their numerical strength was most legitimate. Many Brahmans were anxious to lend a supporting hand to them in their efforts to achieve the socio-economic progress and to gain an adequate representation of "their separate interests in any scheme of political reform". The so-called "Brahman Press" welcomed all the statistical accounts provided by the SIPA in their manifesto.

It was its "militant" tone that marred the manifesto; it was more in the nature of a declaration condemning Brahman supremacy. Elimination of Brahmans rather than elevation of non-Brahmans appeared to be the primary concern of the non-Brahman leaders. *The Hindu* which published the Manifesto in toto commented in its editorial that it gave "a manifestly distorted and unfair representation of many of the matters to which it makes reference. It can serve no good purpose, but it is bound to create bad blood between persons belonging to the same great Indian community, which have been living in perfect harmony and to whom good sense should suggest that there is nothing more suicidal at this moment and perilous to the national cause than to create causes for mutual discord and to play into the hands of the enemies of national progress."<sup>50</sup> The year 1916 was the most crucial one in the history of Indian Politics. It saw the union of the two great political organisations — the Congress and the Muslim League — in voicing the inchoate political aspirations of the masses. Their joint session at Lucknow put forth the demand for a constitution for India based partly on the Dominion principle of self-government. In the same year was drafted the famous "Nineteen Memorandum"\* which was sent up to the Viceroy.

Chetty and Nair, however, opined that the Manifesto was issued at the most appropriate moment as otherwise the Congress Committee's decisions in such vital matters as the revision of the constitution would be misunderstood by the world as the "considered opinions of the 40 millions of non-Brahmans of this large and important province". The Manifesto had made it clear that the entire Presidency was not in favour of Home Rule.

\**Infra* Chapter Five.



To the leaders of the Justice Party, Congress and Brahmans were synonymous. Therefore, they apprehended that *Varaj* would mean *Brahman Raj*. Hence they announced their intention to dissociate themselves from what they chose to describe as “unauthorised constitution making”. Extending their unstinted support and loyalty to the British Government, they even stated: “We are not in favour of any measure which, in operation, is designed or leads completely, to undermine the influence or authority of the British rulers who alone, in the present circumstances of India, are able to hold up scales even between creed and class”.<sup>51</sup> The non-Brahman leaders thus placed narrow communal considerations above nationalism and unwittingly lent their support to the perpetuation of British colonial rule. And they never swerved in this policy of loyalty to the British Government. The Congress ever remained their enemy and the *Raj* their friend! Natesa Mudaliar openly declared: “Sir, the non-Brahmans assisted the British in laying the foundations of the British Empire in India. They poured their money into the British Treasury in the shape of revenue. They came to the rescue of the British Government whenever they were in trouble. They fight the non-co-operators internally, and place men and money at the disposal of the Government when the enemy threatens from abroad. . . .”<sup>52</sup> While referring to the past glories of the Indian National Congress in Madras the signatories to the Manifesto had carefully chosen to eulogise the services of only its non-Brahman leaders like S. Ramaswamy Mudaliar, Rangaiah Naidu, Sabhapati Mudaliar and C. Sankaran Nair. There was an expression of regret at the Madras Congress being controlled by an “irresponsible bureaucracy of Brahmans”.<sup>53</sup> An “attitude of active antagonism” to Brahmans and the Congress thus characterised the Movement from its inception.

Soon after the publication of the Manifesto, the SIPA launched three daily newspapers to voice the grievances of the non-Brahmans. Endowed with an initial capital of one lakh of rupees, the Association purchased a printing Press and brought out the first issue of the *Justice*, their official organ in English on 26 February 1917. It was soon followed by the *Dravidan* in Tamil and the *Andhra Prakasika* in Telugu. The last one was originally edited by A.C. Parthasarathy Naidu.\* These papers apart, the Malayalam week-

\* The paper ran into financial difficulties and its life was despaired of after 33 years of its existence. After the advent of J. C. Molony, the Corporation advertisements were transferred from *Andhra Prakasika* to another Telugu *Patrika*, supporting the

lies of *Kerala Sanchari*, *Keralodayam* and *Malayali* also played a prominent role in spreading the message of the Non-Brahman Movement among the people of West Coast.

The same leaders then decided to form another association for the political advancement of their community. This was to function alongside of the SIPA: the South Indian Liberal Federation (SILF) was thus born. Later it came to be unofficially called the *Justice Party*. In framing the constitution of the Federation, Nair and his western-educated elite group were vastly influenced by the British Liberal tradition. They had also drawn substantially from French radicalism.<sup>54</sup> Even the party organ was named after the great daily paper *La Justice* founded in 1880 by Clemenceau,\* whose political philosophy in those early years had been branded “reckless radicalism”. The opponents of SILF referred to it as the *Justice Party*; the Federation itself eventually adopted it as its unofficial name. Thus the party became popularly known as the *Justice party*.

Though the Movement professed to strive for the social, economic and educational advancement of the backward classes among non-Brahmans, this primary objective was very soon relegated to the background. It concentrated more on the twin demands of separate electorate for non-Brahmans and a government order that every future appointment should be given only to non-Brahmans until the analysis of the departmental figures showed that the non-Brahmans had secured 95 per cent of the appointments made.<sup>55</sup> Indeed a strange situation, which prompted a Cambridge scholar to observe: “. . . while movements which claimed to protect a minority were a common feature of the new politics of India in this period of Councils, ministerships and electorates, it was unusual, if not paradoxical, to find a movement which claimed to defend a majority—a majority which included upto 98 per cent of the population and almost all the men of wealth and influence in local

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Home Rule Movement. Parthasarathy Naidu's request for pecuniary aid was turned down by P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer and Alexander Cardew. When at last, P.T. Chetty came to his rescue, Naidu readily accepted the offer and made his paper the Telugu organ of the SIPA. But Naidu was not at all happy about his new associates. He wrote that he did not really dislike the Brahmins but had been forced to move with the times. (His letters to P. Kesava Pillai dated 14 and 18 September 1916, *Kesava Pillai Papers*).

\* French politician and Prime Minister (1841–1929).



society".<sup>56</sup> J.C. Molony adjudged the Non-Brahman Movement to be a "quasi-political, quasi-sectarian movement", whose sponsors were not "strong enough to keep politics and sectarianism out of a sphere from which they should have been rigorously excluded".<sup>57</sup>

To sustain this Movement which had its origins in caste-prejudice, its sponsors strove hard to prove that the Brahmans were not "the sons of the soil". They reverted to the argument that they came from central Asia millenia ago and so were intruders who "impinged on the true indigenous inhabitants".

To support their contention they cited a passage from *Mitakshara*, an important legal treatise regarded even in modern times as an authority on Hindu Law and which had gained acceptance in whole of South India: "*Aryah trivarnikah Anaryah Sudrah*"—which meant the three *Dvijas* were Aryans and the Sudras were non-Aryans. Their newspapers dwelt on this theme with a vengeance. Mention must be made here of the *Non-Brahman*, a weekly founded in 1916. It surpassed the *Justice* in its raging and tearing propaganda against the Brahmans as a community and against individual members of the community. C. Karunakara Menon the veteran journalist commented on the paper: "I knew that a paper called *Non-Brahman* had come into existence only when I, for the first time, saw its second number. And from its third number, I saw a familiar hand. . . . There is however the possibility of (the paper) exciting class feelings to an undesirable extent. . . ." <sup>58</sup>

Arguments adduced by the non-Brahman papers, journals and books in the Presidency of Madras as well as in other regions in the South favouring the theory of the foreign origin for the Brahmans were master-pieces of polemics. Fixing the original home of the Brahmans in Persia, they wrote that they ate even horses under the pretence of performing *yagas*. While tracing the predigree of the Brahmans, they did not spare even the rishis of yore.<sup>59</sup> Their contention was that the Brahmans were as much aliens as the British; of the two aliens, they should any day prefer the British to the Brahmans as the latter's aim was to "crush down, disorganise, weaken, squeeze and rule the so-called *Sudras* and *Panchamas* and to live on their resources".<sup>60</sup> It was further averred that for 70 years, the non-Brahmans were in a political 'coma' caused by the Aryan autocrats who stood "pre-eminently in Indian horizon being represented by Malaviyajis, Saprus, Nehrus, Mukerjis, Chatterjis, Iyers, Iyengars, Sastris, Pantulus, Acharyas, etc. etc. filling all the highest places such as Federal Judgeships, Advocate Generalships,

Legislatorships, Ministerships, Parliamentary Secretaryships, Dewanships of great native states and several other very high administrative and strategic portfolios of Central as well as Provincial Governments in India.”<sup>61</sup>

Ridiculing the customs of *bhiksha* (begging) the non-Brahmans asked the Brahmans: “go back to beg and we will give our rice with the largest handful”.<sup>62</sup> The Brahmans were also dubbed as “parasites” living on the charity of the non-Brahmans.<sup>63</sup> An appeal was made to all the non-Brahmans to abandon the conduct of their festivals and funerals by Brahmans who were “adepts in the art of deception.”<sup>64</sup>

It is very pertinent to point out here that an important aspect inherent in the caste hierarchy was conveniently ignored by those caste Hindus who indulged in Brahman-baiting in season and out of season. The heinous practice of debasing and despising low caste people just because they were born in those castes was no exclusive privilege of the Brahmans alone. What prevailed was a chain of humiliation indulged in by every caste not excluding the “untouchables”, in respect of others lower than themselves. The non-Brahmans were as much caste-ridden as the Brahmans. There were so many differences among the different sects of non-Brahmans themselves that one sect would not interdine or intermarry with another.

#### *Non-Brahman dissent from Non-Brahman Movement*

The Justice Party professed to represent all the non-Brahmans including the Christians and the Musalmans. But the latter could not be so easily enticed. For instance, the party tried to woo the Musalmans and made overtures to them to join their Movement on the ground that they too were non-Brahmans. But an astounded Muslim community queried: “Whence this logic emanated? Which Philosophy, political or social, has convinced these wiseacres that Muslims are non-Brahmans? Are these gentlemen ready to accept the corollary to their logic namely, as they are non-Brahmans, they are, therefore, Musalmans?”<sup>65</sup>

Many non-Brahman Hindus in the Presidency representing different political organizations such as the National Congress, the Provincial and District Congress Committees, the Madras Mahajana Sabha and various District people’s Associations repudiated communalism as a political principle and denounced the Justicites’ alliance with the British. They refused to acknowledge



Chetty and Nair as the true representatives of the non-Brahmans. At public meetings held in the wake of the publication of the Manifesto, they declared: the engineers of the new movement were not from the oppressed or depressed classes but from the rich, the prosperous and the highly placed families; they were mostly Zamindars, Rajahs and Maharajahs; they were keen to promote their own "insidious objects" such as running their own organs, preaching caste-hatred, organising separate associations and political conferences, and decrying the political activities of the Congress to which they all once owed allegiance.<sup>66</sup> They also charged the party with having no mass following or a policy worth its name.

What irked the majority members of the non-Brahman community was its communal hatred. They warned that the new born party would receive little support from them unless they desisted from calumniating a particular caste and refrained from disparaging the Congress-League Scheme of Reforms to be laid before the Secretary of State for India.<sup>67</sup> It was also felt that by blaming the existing generation of Brahmans alone and attacking them incessantly for the doings of elder generations, the justicites were only "re-enacting the classic story of the wolf and the lamb at the brook". The Justicites were exhorted to stand united by laying before the Secretary of State for India the Scheme of Reforms drafted by the Congress and the Muslim League.

There were non-Brahman leaders like P. Kesava Pillai, Sami Venkatachalam Chetty, Ranganatha Mudaliar and others who were free from any communal bias and hatred and who believed that the "Brahman was also an Indian, that he too had a place on God's earth and that the *Swaraj* would be bitter if communal schisms were perpetuated."<sup>68</sup> Even non-Brahmans of the stature of the Maharaja of Bobbili and T. Ramalingam Pillai openly declared, of course, each from his own view point, that the Non-Brahman movement was unnecessary and that the implied Brahman-hatred was "unbecoming and unjustifiable."<sup>69</sup> The Rajah of Ramnad speaking out his mind to P. Kesava Pillai wrote that while he did not "disapprove of anything that is being done to promote the well-being of the non-Brahman community, the movement, on the lines it is now proposed, will, I fear, result in more harm than good, and especially at this period, when differences are sunk in common causes, a splitting of this kind is highly unwelcome and disastrous".<sup>70</sup> Immediately after the publication of the Manifesto, P. Kesava Pillai who had a proud record of public and patriotic work

sent a long letter to *The Hindu*, repudiating the sentiments contained therein.<sup>71</sup> According to him the Manifesto had been issued without the approval of the SIPA or its managing body, if any, and it was against the opinion of stalwarts among non-Brahmans like C. Sankaran Nair, Ethiraja Mudaliar and others who did not join the Movement.<sup>72</sup> Scurrilous attacks were made in the *Justice* by T.M. Nair on Kesava Pillai for his resolute stand against the “noxious aspect” of the movement. Paying a tribute to Kesava Pillai for his dignified restraint, Kasturiranga Iyengar wrote: “I am sadly disillusioned now and find there are no depths to which he (Nair) will not descend in his attacks upon the leaders of the country and upon the progressive national movement. . . . If the non-Brahman Movement would fall foul of men like Sir C. Sankaran Nair and yourself, its early collapse is inevitable. . . .”<sup>73</sup>

The Justice Party remained impervious to all these criticisms. It would be amusing at this length of time to learn that P. T. Chetty turned so rabidly anti-Congress that even while lying unconscious, he kept saying: “Swarajists are humbugs, be loyal to the throne.”<sup>74</sup> That the party within its narrow circle worked indefatigably towards the liquidation of the Home Rulers was amply testified by their subsequent activities.

The Panchama meeting at Spur-Tank on 7 October 1917 which Nair chaired doubtless gave one the impression that his mission was the extirpation of the entire Brahman caste. In his opening speech in English which was translated into Tamil, he observed: “There is no reason to believe that in the eyes of God you and higher caste men in this country are not equal and in the eyes of the British Government who are supreme rulers in this country also there is no difference between you and the highest caste men.” This insinuation was enough to inflame the worst passions of the mob. The Panchamas physically attacked the unfortunate Brahman boys who were among the audience and injured them. Peace was not restored among the audience until the arrival of the Commissioner of Police armed with a posse of sergeants and constables. Continuing his seditious speech Nair made the most insensate utterance when he advised the Panchamas to give a sound beating as they had just then done to those deemed to stand in the way of their progress.<sup>75</sup> He also exhorted them to start an association “tomorrow” for it would be too late afterwards. According to one report he even made “an outrageous appeal” to his audience to loot *agraharams*.<sup>76</sup> He thus countenanced rowdyism and advocated



violence as a practical demonstration of opposition. Following this inflammatory speech, Brahmans were reportedly belaboured wherever found and their homes violated. The other speakers also spoke in the same vein. Anchasa, the President of the Panchama Mahajana Sabha, was the lone speaker who showed restraint and sanity. He was not to be carried away by the new found sympathy and goody goody talks of the non-Brahman leaders. Without mincing his words, he said that unless and until the non-Brahmans gave up the various distinctions among themselves and recognised the Panchamas as their brethren, they could never claim to represent the latter. He also made it abundantly clear that their path of progress lay not in blind hatred of other communities but in love, union and self-help.<sup>77</sup>

Nair was a most dejected man in 1916 with repeated defeats in elections. He had earned the additional enmity of many of his former friends in his own community thanks to his pro-British leanings and his role in founding the loyalist Justice Party. In such a situation, he had no other alternative but to seek popularity with the innocent Panchamas by openly setting them up against the Brahmans—an act which brought him immense unpopularity. The sponsors of this meeting failed to remember that the Home Rulers and Brahmans “who had not yet been outlawed”, were also entitled to protection from the State.<sup>78</sup>

The organs of the Justice Party gloated over this incident; *The Hindu*, which used the term “apaches” to describe Nair was accused of using scavenger’s language against a respectable politician. As for Nair, the incident earned him the credit for stoking communal flames.

#### *Chetty’s claim—the cablegram\**

The members of the Justice Party were drawn from the forward castes of the urban section who formed only about 19 percent of the population of the Presidency. The backward non-Brahmans formed about 49 percent of the population while the depressed classes (Harijans and Schedule Castes), non-Hindus and Brahmans constituted respectively 17 per cent, 12 per cent and 3 per cent of the population.<sup>79</sup> Even among the 19 per cent of the forward castes

\* There is no recorded evidence to the effect that P.T. Chetty consulted like-minded members within his Association or got the text of the cable passed as a formal resolution in an officially called meeting of the Party.

a sizeable portion being congressites did not subscribe to its views. But Chetty boldly claimed to be the leader of all the non-Brahmans in the Presidency. He astounded not a few by his cablegram of September 1917 to the British Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for India conveying his whole-hearted support for the repressive policy pursued by the Government and strong opposition to the introduction of political reforms. He chose to do it at a time when entire India was seething with political ferment and discontent.

Masquerading as the mouthpiece of 40 million non-Brahmans in the Presidency he also stated that S. Subrahmania Iyer,\* President of the Home Rule Congress Committee, represented only the Brahman. He expressed his endorsement of the views of the *Madras Mail*, the most powerful Anglo-Indian Organ, which was rancorous in its denunciation of whatever the Congress did. This paper, which vehemently opposed the release of Besant, who was interned in Ootacamund by the Madras Government, had a strong supporter in Chetty. Congratulating Chetty and the SIPA on their cablegram, the *Madras Mail* claimed that "if this does not fully justify our prediction that the more conservative, though by no means unprogressive elements in the Indian population would join the Europeans in protest against the danger of the action said to be contemplated by Mr. Montagu, we do not know what can."<sup>80</sup>

Chetty's act inflamed the Indian mind even in the villages.<sup>81</sup> It created a great furore among all nationalist-minded Indians. The non-Brahmans among them were the most offended as the humiliating cablegram had been sent in their name by "one who represented the views of a minority, constituting the clientele of the *Justice* and its vernacular editions".<sup>82</sup> Chetty's claim to represent the entire non-Brahman community of the Presidency was a travesty of truth: the Home Rule League alone had thousand non-Brahmans; besides, there were a number of non-Brahmans "better known to the world than Chettiar or his associates" on the Congress Committee.<sup>83</sup> Hundreds of non-Brahmans in Tanjore and other districts of the Presidency reaffirmed their faith in Home Rule and disapproved the cablegram of Chetty.<sup>84</sup> Many sections of the non-Brahmans, chiefly the Vanniyakula Kshatriyas so numerous

\* President, Home Rule League; a foremost patriot; rendered distinguished service to the Government and the public as Chief Justice of the Madras High Court.



in the Presidency, sent separate communications to Montagu strongly expressing their solicitude for political reforms.<sup>85</sup>

The cablegram cost the Justices the support and goodwill of the non-Justice non-Brahmans. It also hastened the birth of another non-Brahman association — the “Madras Presidency Association”. The majority of the non-Brahmans had already been contemplating the forming of a new non-Brahmans’ party and this incident hastened its birth. The interests of the non-Brahmans were certainly being safeguarded by the already existing institutions like the Madras Mahajana Sabha. However, in the context of the Justice Party indulging only in such activities as ‘Brahman baiting’ and ‘Job hunting’ in the name of the non-Brahman Community, a pressing need for a separate association to promote the educational, social and political advancement of the non-Brahmans of the Presidency was perceived by some non-Brahmans who were positive in their approach. Under the leadership of Kesava Pillai, noted for his broad political views, the Madras Presidency Association rendered meritorious service to the Congress and the country at large during the “crisis of the anti-Congress movement of Dr. Nair” which threatened to damage the national cause.

V. Chakkarai Chetty\* was very suspicious of Nair’s activities in England when the latter was there in 1919. He urged the Madras Presidency Association to send forthwith a deputation to England to counteract the raging and tearing propaganda carried on by the former to “demolish all the Brahmins”.<sup>86</sup> He even stated that Brahmins would help them financially. Chakkarai Chetty openly acknowledged the non-Brahmins’ debt to Brahmins at a non-Brahman conference in December 1919 to which he was invited by Ramarayaningar. By attacking the Congress ideals for which so many of them had worked so long and so earnestly they could gain nothing except the ill-will of many of their own non-Brahman brethren. “But for the labour of the Congress”, Chakkarai Chetty wrote, “we should not have got the Minto-Morley Reforms and the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and should not have thought of the non-Brahman communal representation too”.<sup>87</sup>

The British were only too happy to cash in on the split and the consequent support to them of a dominant group of non-Brahmins just at a time when the Brahman intelligentsia was taking a leading role in the anti-British National agitation. They delighted in ex-

\* Labour leader; member of the Madras Presidency Association.

aggravating this rift making light of the political agitation for self-government in the Madras Presidency. B.N. Sarma's resolution at the Imperial Legislative Council condemning the recommendation of the Public Service Commission that there should be a preponderance of Europeans in the Civil and Police Services was a case in point. Couchman, who represented the Madras Council on the bigger council, countered him stating that in view of the difference of opinion between the Brahmans and the non-Brahmans, Sarma's resolution could not be taken to have the approval of all Indians.<sup>88</sup> This struggle between the 'Nationalist Congress' and the Non-Brahman loyalists' conferred on the politics of the Madras Presidency a distinctive character compared to the politics of the North.<sup>89</sup>

The Brahman community as a whole had obviously under-rated the militant turn of the Non-Brahman Movement. The failure of a community, which did not certainly lack in agility and boldness, to act collectively to counteract the untoward tendencies of the non-Brahman Movement is inexplicable. Perhaps the fact that they constituted a very small minority deterred them from launching a counter-movement. Whatever the cause for their failure to safeguard the interests of their community, their attitude which amounted to acquiescing in their self-effacement was disapproved by many leaders outside the Presidency. A prominent member of the Punjab Legislative Council urged the Brahmans of the Presidency to react effectively to the deadly blow struck against them by the majority community and protect the interests of the minority community in South India.<sup>90</sup> Even letters to the press against this unexpected turn were sent mostly by non-Brahmans rather than Brahmans. The anguish of the members of this oppressed community and their concern about the "injustice to the minority and inefficiency in the administration" were expressed only in their private letters to their friends. For instance, P. S. Sivaswamy wrote that the Brahman in Madras "occupies, to some extent, the position of odium which is the lot of the Jew in Europe, though he is not possessed of any wealth to attract envy";<sup>91</sup> and that at the rate at which "this campaign goes on, the members of this community will have seriously to think of emigration to a more hospitable country."<sup>92</sup>

Silam\* of Bombay, a thoroughly nationalist non-Brahman,

\* The first Lieutenant Governor of the Union Territory of Pondicherry.



refuted the allegations that Congress was Brahman-ridden. He plainly declared that the non-Brahmans had never been penalised in the Congress because they were non-Brahmans. He even said that the non-Brahmans being physically stronger had practically shut the doors of military service against Brahmans.<sup>93</sup> Annie Besant publicly questioned the propriety of starting a movement against a minority community. This Irish lady, whose love for India was unfathomable and who rendered magnificent service to Indian education and politics said, "I cannot remain silent in the face of the unjust propaganda made against a small class by an overwhelming majority."<sup>94</sup>

The replies of the Justice leaders to some of the attacks made by Besant were inconsistent with their own principles. When the *New India* held P. T. Chetty responsible for creating the split in the Hindu community by his crusade against Brahmans, the non-Brahman leaders denied the charge and reiterated their debt to the Brahmans who had helped them. Here are some samples: "Men like S. Srinivasa Iyengar and Ranga Achari do sympathise with our efforts to raise ourselves".<sup>95</sup>

"Mr. C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer is one of the few Brahmans whom we admire and whom we hold up as an example to our community".

"We think it our duty to point out that our goal is self-government as much as it is Congress leaders'. We want Home Rule as badly as anyone else—not even Mrs. Besant excepted...when stung by Brahman selfishness we say that we prefer Europeans to Brahmans. We do not mean it, we say it in anger. . . ."<sup>96</sup>

### *Claim for Communal Representation:*

Initially the Non-Brahman Movement was stoutly opposed to the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. Its leaders said that the country stood in no need of any reform. On the contrary, they added, the country had received since 1909 more reforms than she could possibly digest. The Montford Reforms were therefore regarded with deep suspicion as calculated to confer more power on Brahmans who alone were perceived to be its beneficiaries. This belief was so firmly implanted in them as to ignore the fact that, even in 1916, when the hatred against Brahmans had snowballed into unedifying dimensions, there were Brahmans who declared from Congress platforms that so long as self-government was gained, it did not

matter if power were granted even to the so-called untouchables.<sup>97</sup>

However, when the Reforms became inevitable, the leaders of the Justice Party bargained for safeguards for their community that constituted a bulk of the electorate. They raised a claim for communal representation by communal electorates. Many non-Brahmans of consequence advised them against this demand which would perpetuate endless cleavages between the two castes. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, for whom the leaders had some regard, stated that communal electorates for non-Brahmans would result in the emergence of "a hundred sub-castes amongst the Mudaliars, Naidus, Chettiars and Reddis each of whom will clamour for representation and each will cheerfully cut the throat of his followers".<sup>98</sup>

In the meantime, the Government of India formed in 1918 a seven member Franchise Committee under the Chairmanship of Southborough which was empowered to examine questions relating to the electorates, constituencies and franchise. This Committee had two Indian members on it, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and Surendranath Banerjee. The Justice Party objected to the nomination of both these Indians because they were Congress Brahmans and were wedded to a policy which was unequivocally opposed to the principle of communal representation by communal electorates. Their appointment was declared to be the very negation of British justice. They were particularly opposed to the appointment of V.S. Srinivasa Sastri who was "a pronounced Madras Brahman".<sup>99</sup> One of the chief organs of the non-Brahman party wanted to know what "uncommon wisdom" the Government had found in Sastri to justify his selection as a member of the Franchise Committee.<sup>100</sup> The Viceroy and the Secretary of State were accused of openly encouraging the formation of political agitation which had for its ultimate object "the re-establishment of that political Brahman supremacy which is detrimental to the advancement of the non-Brahman communities".<sup>101</sup> It was averred that the Congress, which was opposed to the scheme of communal representation recognised by the Morley-Minto Reforms Scheme, would do away with communal electorate even for Mohammadans if it could.<sup>102</sup>

The Government sent letters well in advance to the leaders of the Justice Party as well as to the Madras Adi-Dravida Sabha requesting them all to appear before the Franchise and the Division of Functions Committee during their stay in Madras. The Adi-Dravida Sabha wrote that they would appear before the Committee to



tender evidence “only if Sastri and Banerjee to whose presence on the Committee we have already objected, are removed from the Committee during our appearance before it”.<sup>103</sup> P.T. Chetty responded by enclosing the two resolutions of the non-Brahman confederation held on 20 October 1918 and 11 and 12 January 1919 which enjoined on its members to “decline to appear before or in any way to co-operate with the Reforms Committees unless one or more non-Brahman members representing the views of the SILF are appointed to each of the Committees”.<sup>104</sup> T.M. Nair, who was already in England, was canvassing privately for communal representation. His activities caused much concern to some English friends of the Congress there. “Dr. Nair is here, and is capable of doing untold harm. I am not at liberty to disclose it but it is certain that such a man cannot be suppressed, and if he cannot himself speak, he can do any amount of injury surreptitiously”, wrote Polak.<sup>105</sup> Nair had been going about in England telling privately that he had Curzon’s promise to the effect that “there shall be communal representation”.<sup>106</sup> However, it was clear from the subsequent events that the advocates of communal representation would not succeed in their efforts in England. Nair died unexpectedly in July 1919.

The Committee reported that “the refusal of the non-Brahman leaders to appear at their enquiry deprived the Franchise Committee of all power of intervention and made settlement by consent impossible”. On the basis of whatever facts they could ascertain from other sources during their stay in Madras the Committee decided on reserving a considerable number of seats for non-Brahmans in plural member constituencies. They ruled out as “unreasonable” the constitution of a separate communal electorate for non-Brahmans who had an “overwhelming electoral strength”.<sup>107</sup> They were certain that if the capacity already devoted to politics among the non-Brahmans were properly utilised in organising this great majority, the community would within a short space of time find its preponderance felt effectively despite the power and influence of the Brahmans.

The Committee recommended that if the non-Brahmans devised any scheme that might afford “a reasonable prospect of a speedy and equitable settlement even after statutory effect had been given to the proposals, their schemes might be entertained”.<sup>108</sup>

The militant Justice Party leaders rejected the proposal outright. The Brahmans and some sections of the non-Brahmans accepted

it. The Congress, fighting as it was for self-government, was prepared to accept any solution to reach its goal. If self-government were granted, it was ready to sacrifice its own interests by accepting a mere five seats out of a hundred to be elected to the Legislative Council. Presiding over the Madras Nationalists' Conference in 1919 Kasturiranga Iyengar said: "I have no doubt in my mind that unless the interests of those who form a large section of the population are given due consideration and adequately supported, there can be no true national advancement and growth".<sup>109</sup> Pattabhi Sitaramayya wrote to all the papers, not excluding *Justice*, that the Brahmans as a separate electorate would be satisfied with only 5 per cent of seats in a self-governing province.<sup>110</sup> A non-Brahman wrote to *The Hindu* that "no non-Brahman can shut his eyes to the fact that in demanding Home Rule with communal representation, the Brahmans have proved their readiness to commit political suicide, if that were to be demanded of them for the sake of the motherland".<sup>111</sup> Many non-Brahmans of consequence declared at public meetings that their strength in the local bodies being sufficiently large, there was no need for them to demand separate representation. Such a demand from a majority community would make the designs of the "earthly gods" to bring about estrangement between the two castes and disunite the nation easier.<sup>112</sup>

Then came the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee on Reforms under the Chairmanship of Selborne. This Committee had already received much evidence from various witnesses of the overwhelming influence of the Brahmans in the Presidency. Based on it, it recommended reservation of certain number of seats to non-Brahmans in the new legislature in the Madras Presidency, similar to what was being done for the Europeans, the Anglo-Indians, the Indian Christians and the Mohammadans. But it did not specify the number of seats. It was left to be settled by agreement between the two castes, failing which, the matter would be referred to an arbitrator specially appointed for this purpose by the Government of India. A most ticklish issue would have been solved and further disaffection between the two groups averted, if the Joint Committee itself had fixed the number of seats to be reserved instead of leaving it to the decision of the contending parties.

As per the Joint Committee's recommendations it was decided to secure special representation for non-Brahmans by reserving certain seats in the general electorate for non-Brahmans and not



by constituting special electorates consisting solely of non-Brahman voters and open only to non-Brahman candidates.

One of the very first acts of Willingdon after assuming the Governorship of Madras in 1919 was to invite representatives of both the castes to settle the question of reservation of seats. The first conference was held on 14 January 1920 at the Governor's Chamber and, although Willingdon did not participate in the deliberations, he urged the parties to augur the Reform Scheme well by compromise and co-operation. But he "hopelessly failed", as he himself confessed, with the non-Brahmans demanding 70 per cent of the seats.<sup>113</sup> Hoping against hope, Willingdon arranged for yet another conference.

In the meantime, the SILF convened a meeting on 29 January 1920, and resolved to insist at the proposed second conference that the Brahmans be given not more than seven seats. This decision was based on the opinion of Major Ormesby Gore, a member of the Joint Select Committee on Reforms: "It is the number of seats assigned to the Brahmans that should be specified."<sup>114</sup>

The second conference was held on 31 January 1920 and fifteen leading members of both communities were present. Willingdon, who chaired the meeting, reiterated that a 50 per cent reservation to non-Brahmans in the general constituencies which then numbered 63 (9 urban and 54 rural), would be a "fair compromise".<sup>115</sup> The Brahmans agreed to this proposal. Referring to the resolution of the SILF, C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer said that the non-Brahmans should be concerned only with the minimum number of seats that should be reserved for *their* community to safeguard *their* interests against a possible monopolising by the Brahmans of the general constituencies comprising both the communities. He thus made it abundantly clear that the question should not be approached from the point of view of population. In general, the Brahman representatives wanted special reservation of seats to be limited in scope as far as possible; otherwise, they argued, it would act as a restraint on the freedom of choice conferred on the elector.<sup>116</sup>

But the non-Brahman representatives were determined not to budge from their stand. Since the proportion of Brahmans to non-Brahmans on the electoral roll was 1 to 8, Chetty was against giving more than 7 seats out of the 63 to Brahmans. He argued that the reservation of 50 per cent would be far too low for the non-Brahmans who could never hope to win even 5 per cent out of the remaining thirty odd open seats in a mixed electorate. K. V. Reddy Naidu

pointed out that since the Indian Christians who were equal in number to Brahman and the Mohammadans who were more than double the Brahmans were given only 6 and 15 seats respectively in the new Legislature, the Brahman representation should be reduced to the barest minimum. Assuming that the Brahmans would secure more than 75 per cent of the open seats, he argued that the non-Brahmans should have at least two-thirds of the 63 general seats reserved for them.<sup>117</sup> In effect, the non-Brahmans wanted the Brahmans to allow them to hold all the seats in the new Legislative Council.<sup>118</sup>

V. Chakkarai Chetty an Indian Christian representing the Madras Presidency Association, insisted on the reservation of more than 50 per cent of the seats for the non-Brahmans. He said his Association's mandate to him was not to accept anything less than 60 per cent. P. Kesava Pillai, President of the Madras Presidency Association, appealed to the Brahmans to agree to the reservation of 36 seats for the non-Brahmans. In response to this appeal, T. Ranga Achariar pointed out that 50 per cent of 63 being 32, there was not much of a difference between this formula and Kesava Pillai's demand for 36 seats. But the latter adamantly adhered to his demand for a reservation of 36 seats.<sup>119</sup> This obstinate stance of the representatives of the Madras Presidency Association shocked some of their own members: P. Varadarajulu Naidu, for instance, offered his resignation of Secretaryship of Madras Presidency Association on principle. The following are excerpts from his letter to Kesava Pillai:<sup>120</sup>

“As a nationalist, I think, this clannish strife between the Brahman and the non-Brahman is dangerous to the steady growth of national unification and I think it is unpatriotic and suicidal to allow it to grow. The Presidency Association, instead of coming out again to save the situation, is concentrating on the petty question of reservation of seats . . . I do not agree with the Association in thinking that 36 seats should be reserved and only a smaller number should be left open. . . . I saw your letter to Lodd Govind Dass and I was surprised to find in it that you refuse to give evidence before Lord Meston and suggest two other gentlemen who hold the views of Nairites. This hastened my resignation and shattered my faith in you. . . . As the public meetings held at Tiruppur and other places demand that I should withdraw my resignation being ignorant of the reasons for my action, I send a copy of this letter to the press”.



The Governor's exhortation to the non-Brahmans to show a sporting spirit and accept the compromise went unheeded. The non-Brahmans did not then realise that they were losing a golden opportunity of securing a good portion of what they wanted. The Brahmans at least could have yielded to an amicable adjustment even though it meant losing a few seats. Perhaps the contingency of their having to start with a large number of non-Brahmans—5 Indian Christians, 6 Depressed Classes, 8 Zamindars, 13 Mohamadans, 10 Officials and 3 or 4 Europeans—against them, had impelled them to adopt an 'intractable attitude'. The Brahman residents of Madras presented a memorandum signed by a large number of members to the Governor notifying their opposition to the grant of reservation of more than 50 per cent of the seats to the non-Brahmans.<sup>121</sup>

The parley thus broke off a second time frustrating the last attempt of Willingdon at preserving harmony between the two castes. The disillusioned Governor told them that their refusal to reach a consensus "placed a black mark against the credit of the Presidency".<sup>122</sup> He announced his decision to request the Viceroy to appoint Meston as the arbitrator. Two sections of the Hindu community thus gave room for arbitration by a foreigner.

Willingdon was thoroughly displeased with the "perfectly monstrous manner" in which the non-Brahmans behaved towards him. He even felt that they should not have been allowed "this most unfair advantage which they are most unfairly exploiting".<sup>123</sup> The split between the two castes widened after this episode. Willingdon who remarked that the "Brahmans were not as bad a lot as was represented to him by the non-Brahman gentlemen" was nicknamed "Brahman Lord".<sup>124</sup> He was charged with partiality and lack of statesmanship.<sup>125</sup>

The question of communal representation had worried the Governor from the very beginning of his term of office. In almost every letter that he wrote to the Secretary of State for India there was a reference to this "communal business" and to his being bombarded for special representation by the various sub-castes of the non-Brahmans numbering about 250 in a Council of only 127.<sup>126</sup> There were occasions when he really despaired of the future. He was totally opposed to the communal principle and even hoped that the Commission, after an enquiry at the end of ten years, would find it unnecessary to continue this privilege of communal electorate for a further term even in the case of Mohammadans.<sup>127</sup>

Willingdon fondly hoped that the representation of other minority communities could be ensured entirely by nomination. Referring to Southborough's Report proposing grant of communal representation to the Indian Christians and non-Brahmans, he wrote that he would never "start this communal principle which is a slippery slope down which we are beginning to slide and I cannot see where we are to stop".<sup>128</sup>

Before the arbitrator assumed charge of his duties, Willingdon made a last bid to settle the never-ending controversy of reservation of seats and fixed up the meeting for 6 February 1920. But this was foiled by Sydenham, Member of Parliament and former Governor of Bombay and his coadjutor Welby, former Editor of the Madras Mail, who wired the SILF not to agree to reservation of seats but to agitate for communal electorates<sup>129</sup>. The Madras Presidency Association joined forces with the SILF.

### *The Meston Award*

On 1 March 1920 Lord Meston, who was acquainted with all the antecedent facts, met the representatives of both the parties for consultations. There were 6 representatives of the Brahman caste\*, who had no plenipotentiary powers and 6 representatives of the non-Brahman caste\*\* who had them. The SILF expressed a preference for communal representation failing which they would endorse the claim of the Madras Presidency Association for 42 seats to be reserved for the non-Brahmans out of the 65\*\*\* allotted to the general Hindu electorate. The Brahmans were unanimous in their demand that if 65 seats were to be filled by the votes of the general Hindu electorate, not more than 25 or 26 of these should be reserved for the non-Brahmans.<sup>130</sup>

\*T.R. Ramachandra Iyer, C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, Peri Narayanamurti Pantulu, M. Ramachandra Rao, K. Rama Iyengar and B.V. Narasimha Iyer.

\*\*P. Kesava Pillai, V. Chakkarai Chettiar, Lodd Govind Dass, L.K. Thulsiram, P.T. Chetty and A. Ramaswamy Mudaliar.

\*\*\* Modifications were effected by the Government of Madras after discussions with the non-official members of the Legislative Council by way of reductions and additions of seats in certain districts. The number of seats for Madras City general was reduced from 5 to 4; separate urban constituencies were made of Cocanada (Kakinada) and Vizagapatam (Visakhapatnam); the urban constituency of Calicut was merged in the general rural constituency of Malabar; the rural seats in Vizagapatam were reduced from 3 to 2; and the rural seats in Ganjam were increased from 2 to 3. The removal of Calicut from the list of Municipalities was strongly opposed by the public of that region.



The final award made by Meston by way of solution to end the *impasse* gave only 28\* seats for non-Brahmans out of 65. The grounds he gave in support of his decision may be reviewed briefly:

There was no need to reserve a large majority of seats or “indeed any majority” for the non-Brahmans simply to avert their being swept over by the minority Brahmans on account of the latter’s social status and electioneering tactics. The non-Brahmans had a “very great preponderance” over the Brahmans in the electoral rolls, which the former had themselves put as 8 to 1. Enjoying a vast majority of seats both in the Municipal Councils and the District Boards, the non-Brahmans needed nothing more than a reasonable minimum number of seats reserved for themselves. Reservation of an absolute majority of seats for the non-Brahmans in the mixed Hindu electorates would place them in a “position of security which might tend to impair their cohesion and encourage sectional differences”.<sup>131</sup>

But many sections of public opinion were profoundly disappointed at the award. *The Hindu*, which was unhappy over Meston’s decision, wrote that it was bound to embitter the non-Brahmans. Meston had been a Member of the Government of India in which capacity he was a party to the fifth despatch of 23 April 1919 sent to the Secretary of State for India. It plainly stated that unless the bitter feelings of the non-Brahmans were allayed, the Reforms Scheme was sure to start under a very heavy handicap in Madras. Emphasising that numbers counted very little in India against the social, educational and religious superiority, the despatch urged the Secretary of State to arrange the plural constituencies “in such a way that thirty out of the sixty one non-Mohammadan seats could be reserved for non-Brahmans but that both parties might contest the remaining seats without restriction”.

In the context of the above statement it was incomprehensible as to why Meston as arbitrator fixed his award at 28 while he himself as a Member of the Government of India, had recommended 30 out of 61, which would mean 33 out of the existing 65. He had

\* Two seats in the City of Madras; the single seat allotted to the town of Tinnevely and Palayamcottah; the single seat allotted to Nilgiris; one seat in each of the plural constituencies for the districts of Anantapur, North Arcot, South Arcot, Bellary, Chingleput, Chittoor, Coimbatore, Cuddalore, Ganjam, Godavari, Guntur, South Kanara, Krishna (I Division), Krishna (II Division), Kurnool, Madura, Malabar, Nellore, Ramnad, Salem, Tanjore, Tinnevely, Trichonopoly and Vizagapatam.

also thrown to the winds the 50 per cent expressly offered by Willingdon at the Conference of the leaders on 31 January 1920.

As anticipated, the adjudication of Meston caused a grave disquiet among the non-Brahmans who condemned the award as one influenced by the Brahman oligarchy. They felt that the cause for which they laboured hard for three years and for which T.M. Nair laid down his life had been lost.<sup>132</sup> Their accusations against the Brahmans had no substance. But the possibility of the arbitrator being influenced by Willingdon could not be ruled out. When the first conference held on 14 January between the two parties failed, the irate Governor stated, "I hope to goodness the arbitrator does not give them (non-Brahmans) more than 25 per cent".<sup>133</sup> After Meston announced his award, Willingdon commented: "...Meston is here and has done his arbitration. He is going to give the non-Brahmans 28 seats which is less than 50 percent I suggested when I tried to mediate. I am delighted, but the fur will be flying when the verdict becomes known".<sup>134</sup>

Instead of reviewing the situation calmly and devising a suitable course of action, the leading men of the non-Brahman community indulged in mudslinging. If Chetty advised the SILF to boycott wholesale the Brahman element in the new Councils, the Madras Presidency Association under the aegis of Kesava Pillai went one further in moving a resolution to that effect. None of them cared to think that such a purblind policy of total severance of political associations with the Brahmans would only fan the flame of caste animosity which was already tearing the Presidency asunder.

Besant bluntly told Kesava Pillai that he was not standing by the weak, meaning the Brahmans. She wrote "your party is the strong one in rank, money, land and numbers. In addition to all these, you are given 28 seats, and the right to contest the remainder, and yet you complain".<sup>135</sup> There were even talks of the amalgamation of the Madras Presidency Association and the SILF.<sup>136</sup> The Justice party offered the Vice-Presidentship of the Council to Kesava Pillai. But he would not accept it unless he had the "freedom of speech when not in the Chair".<sup>137</sup>

A non-Brahman representation signed by K.V. Reddy Naidu was sent on 23 April 1920 to Viceroy Chelmsford requesting him to forward their grievances to the Secretary of State as the number fixed by Meston could be revised only by the Joint Committee of the Parliament.<sup>138</sup> The Memorialists also begged that similar representation was necessary in the Legislative Assembly of India to be set up



under the new Act. In the existing Imperial Legislative Council all the three elective seats available for Hindus being occupied by Brahmans,\* they argued, there was not a single non-Brahman member from the Madras Presidency on that body. Reddy Naidu pleaded at the meeting of the Reforms Advisory Committee on 15 March 1920 that the arguments for provincial reservation applied with equal force to the Central legislature. Anticipating a predominance of landlord voters for the Legislative Assembly he asserted that this class was in the hands of vakils of whom 90 per cent were Brahmans. But his fear was dismissed as nebulous and he was outvoted at this meeting. The question came up in another form on 16 and 17 April at Simla when the constituencies for the new Legislative Assembly from the Madras Presidency were considered. By way of amending the draft rules which proposed ten single member constituencies, Reddy Naidu recommended that these constituencies should be reduced to 4 with 2 seats each so that one of those might be reserved for the non-Brahmans. But 4 out of the 6 members present voted against this amendment.<sup>139</sup>

In June 1920, both SILF and the Madras Presidency Association sent a lengthy cable to the Joint Committee protesting against the Meston Award. Apart from demanding 42 seats as against the 28 fixed by Meston, the cable protested against proportional representation for the Council of States and also against Brahmans being made eligible for non-Brahman constituencies if and when non-Brahmans were not forthcoming.<sup>140</sup>

The Communal virus tarnishing the fair name of the Presidency began with the creation in 1909 of separate electorates on the basis of religion. It was fostered to a considerable degree by the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms scheme. Highly "amorphous" in nature, the Scheme succeeded in dividing the electorate into many compartments with a view to giving separate electorate to the Englishmen, Anglo-Indians, Mohammadans, Indian Christians, Zamindars and trading and planting community. The general electorate comprised only the Brahmans and the non-Brahmans who had not been allocated separate seats. In such a situation, as the *Hindu* rightly observed, "there is no particular political virtue, so far as we can see, in having a so-called electorate in which Brahmans and non-Brahmans only can compete, the latter having already the privilege of a number of reserved seats otherwise provided".

\* V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, B. N. Sarma and Surendranath Banerjee.

Though the non-Brahman leaders were most dissatisfied with the quantum of representation they got under the Meston Award, the very first elections of 1920 held under the Reforms showed that they needed no special protection at all. They managed to win more seats than they had staked their claims for. Out of the 65 general seats (including the 28 reserved), 47 were won by the non-Brahmans\* and only 18 by the Brahmans. Nevertheless, they sought to retard the Home Rule Movement which demanded scope for self-government for Indians.

\* In all the by-elections that followed it, the non-Brahmans were returned in large numbers, increasing their number in the Legislative Council to 50 and reducing that of the Brahmans to 15.

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138. Willingdon to Reading, 1 June 1923, *Reading Papers*.
139. *Ibid.*
140. V. Chakkarai Chetty to P. Kesava Pillai, 12 June 1920, *Kesava Pillai Papers*.

## CHAPTER THREE

# Annie Besant—The Prophetess of Indian Home Rule

Annie Besant, an Irish born lover of India, was the prophetess of the Indian Home Rule Movement. Besides being a Theosophist, educationalist and social reformer Annie Besant was also an Indian Independence leader who inspired and guided the movement for the liberation of India in its earlier stages. The Theosophist, educationalist and social reformer in her laid the foundation for the last one—the champion of the Home Rule Movement. Besant firmly believed that without a widespread religious faith, a truly national education and an enlightened society, there could be no “safe political uplift”.

Annie Wood, as Besant was known before her marriage, was born on 10 October 1847. She had to suffer two misfortunes before she was twenty. The first occurred in 1852 when her father died; the second and the more severe one in 1867 when she was married to Rev. Frank Besant, an English Clergyman whom she did not love. By 1873, the marriage broke. In 1874, she became acquainted with Charles Bradlaugh, the English free-thinker and radical, who became prominent for his championship of individual liberty. The mystical and imaginative Besant found a “wonderful man” in Bradlaugh under whose banner she faced the world as a militant free thinker and an “explosive” speaker notwithstanding the fierce opposition she encountered in the process. She was long associated with this British Member of Parliament and friend of India and became co-editor of his *National Reformer*. Their close alliance terminated in 1885 when Besant drifted from secularism into Theosophy and theism under the influence of Madame Blavatsky, the Russian Leader.

Her gravitation towards Theosophy changed the whole course of her life. After attending the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in America in 1893 Besant threw herself heart and soul



into Theosophy. She set foot on the Indian soil for the first time on 16 November 1893 landing at Tuticorin in the Madras Presidency. Thereafter she worked ceaselessly for the Theosophical Society which was already functioning in Madras. Ultimately, she rose to be its President in 1907. Though a Theosophist, she was a Hindu by religion as she had adopted it. She made Madras her home, taking to Indian costume and Indian habits. Between 1893 and 1914, she was deeply immersed in the pursuance of religious, social and educational activities which constituted a fitting background for her memorable work in the political arena. A peerless scholar, she had drunk deep from the fountains of Hindu Scriptures, religion and philosophy. The Theosophical Society with its headquarters in Madras, the Central Hindu College in Benares which eventually blossomed into a mighty centre of learning as the Benares Hindu University, and the Young Men's Indian Association which was started on the lines of the Young Men's Christian Association, stand as enduring monuments not only for her superior talents and gifts but also for her genius and capacity in building institutions.

Besant had been well acquainted also with the political life of India. In her book *England, India and Afghanistan*, she fearlessly attacked Beaconsfield's Imperialist Policy. Even before coming to India, she wrote clearly what in her view were Britain's obligations to India: "We cannot simply try to throw off our vast responsibility; we cannot, having seized India, now fling it aside. What is our duty to this great land and how may we best remedy our crimes in the past? The answer comes in one word: Liberty; train India for Freedom; educate India for Self-Government. Do not only proclaim that Indians shall be eligible for the high places of the State. Place them there".<sup>1</sup>

The Theosophical Society stoked the fire of patriotism in the youth of the Presidency and thus kept aloft the flame of nationalism. The Society was founded at a time when the heady wine of English education made the generality of the Indian youth almost despise their country's unrivalled past and to accept for their homeland a future of unending servility. Enamoured of the titles and prizes, rewards and berths in the rank of subordinate services conferred on them by an alien government they had the least compunction about decrying their own hoary civilisation and sublime culture as barbaric. The Theosophical Society played no mean role in arresting this perilous trend that had overtaken the rising generation and in

attracting the youth to the glory of their country's past. Their preachings extolling the superior spiritual heritage of the people of India and emphasising the urgent necessity for the children of the soil to reclaim this heritage so as to resume the role of teachers of humanity even as their forefathers had done, had a profound impact on the western educated Indian *intelligentsia*. It infused in them a new spirit, a new pride in their race. It also inspired them with the confidence that they could fight for their country's inalienable right to freedom and its rightful place in the comity of nations. By thus stirring the soul of the Presidency, the Theosophical Society also sowed the seeds for a new political life making it vibrate with the great heart throb of freedom.

This religious Society had a proud record of achievements in the arena of politics as well. It was perfectly justified in claiming the "fathership" of the Indian National Congress. For A.O. Hume, a member of the Indian Civil Service who was generally acclaimed to be the Father of that great national body, was a Theosophist. And so were Narendranath Sen and S. Subrahmanya Iyer. Again the claim that the prominent Theosophists who met at the residence of Raghunatha Rao in Madras in December 1884 were responsible for mooted the idea of the Congress, is not untenable.

#### *Entry into Indian Politics :—*

In India itself Besant took to politics directly and more fervently only in 1914 when she laid the foundations of the Home Rule Movement in Madras. She deemed it to be the supreme activity of her life. She courageously went about the preparatory measures for the memorable Home Rule Campaign which was to grow luxuriantly and embrace the whole of the sub-continent.

The fundamental idea underlying the Movement, which was to go down in history as a momentous milestone of the freedom struggle, was to bring in a reconciliation between the legitimate demands of the National Congress and the needs of the British Empire to maintain its unity and integrity. Whatever the terminology used to connote the goal of the Indian Nationalist Movement, its ultimate objective was unmistakably sovereign independence. Gokhale himself admitted that he preached the ideal of colonial self-government in preference to any other only because that was more easily understood by the British public which in turn made the



course of constitutional agitation for political liberation smoother. Since sovereign independence was incompatible with the idea of the Empire, there was no means of effecting a rational synthesis between the two ideals of Indian Nationalism and British Imperialism.<sup>2</sup> Besant maintained that such a hybrid "Nationalist Imperialism" could be achieved and British connection with India perpetuated through the establishment of Home Rule in India. The term "Home Rule" no doubt alarmed many Moderates as it was associated with the violent and aggressive Home Rule Movement of Ireland under Parnell. Besant obviously meant by the term the perpetuation of India's political ties with the British through federalism. She held that the grant of self-government was the surest means for forging a bond between the suzerain power and the subordinate but autonomous governments. The despatch sent by Viceroy Hardinge about the same time to England also harped on the theme of federalism. Hardinge clearly and courageously set out a guideline for British policy in India. Unfortunately, no one could recognise the historic significance of this despatch.

Besant returned to India from England in 1913 with her cry for Home Rule. Her first major activity after returning to India was the starting in January 1914 of a weekly organ called the *Commonweal*. This was to bring Britain and India closer together, by making known in Great Britain something of the Indian National Movement and of the men who would influence from India the destinies of the Empire.

The demand for Home Rule itself was but a reiteration of the long-standing demand of the Congress. As early as 1895, Tilak had presented a memorandum on the Home Rule Bill for India which, under the prevailing political conditions, failed to gather momentum. There was, therefore, nothing new or original about the ideal. But what gave her campaign such tremendous popularity was Besant's astounding tenacity, perseverance and determination to carry the campaign in the worst circumstances, when her own countrymen calumniated her. She played a very substantial role in broadcasting the ideal of the Indian National Congress to the public of the Presidency of Madras at large by bringing into the national arena hundreds of students, teachers, government servants, social workers and other intellectuals.

Within a year after the out-break of the First World War, she launched what the Government itself avowed as the "red hot agita-

tion” for Home Rule.<sup>3</sup> Since the weekly *Commonweal* was intended primarily for foreign consumption there arose a great need for another newspaper—a daily, which would keep pace with the growing needs of her Home Rule propaganda in India. Besant bought the *Madras Standard*, a newspaper which happened to be in for sale, in July 1914. This oldest daily in Madras which was founded in 1841, was “going downhill” for a long time. Besant changed it to suit her political needs under the appropriate name *New India*.<sup>\*</sup> From 1100 copies in July 1914, the *New India* increased to 5,000 in August and, ere long, became the national champion of *Swaraj*. Besant was also the registered keeper of the Press at which these papers were printed. The papers became the armaments in her battle for Indian Home Rule. The *New India* was not obsessed by politics to the exclusion of other subjects of human interest. It was fearless and independent but thoroughly sober and well balanced.<sup>4</sup> The *New India* had besides Besant, a band of able staff, who were fashioned by her into journalists, reporters, advertising agents, sub-editors and business officials. It was owing to such a good team that the paper continued even during the period of her internment in 1917, notwithstanding the constant extortions of the Government in the shape of enormous fines for trenchant writing in support of her Home Rule Movement. For Besant, the *New India* was “a deeply loved child and if she had to leave it a while, she arranged to receive the most constant news as to its well being”.<sup>5</sup>

As an organ of advanced nationalist opinion, the *New India* provoked the wrath of the bureaucracy in Madras. To the latter, the paper was the English organ of the extreme section of the Indian Nationalists written and managed by “men imported from Bombay” and circulating all over India. Pentland, Governor of Madras, called it a “daily political broadsheet rather than a newspaper” which “unfortunately was printed and published in India”.<sup>6</sup>

Besant’s association with the Congress began in 1914 when the twenty-ninth session of the Indian National Congress was held at Madras.<sup>\*\*</sup> This session saw her for the first time on the platform of the great National Assembly. At this Congress, Besant supported

<sup>\*</sup> It is said that Besant and C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer jointly purchased the *Madras Standard*, the money being partly contributed by the latter (A. Besant—*An Autobiography*; p.559).

<sup>\*\*</sup> Governor Pentland attended the second day of this session of the Congress. For the first time in the history of the Indian National Congress, a provincial Governor participated in its proceedings.



a resolution demanding self-government for India. She herself moved a resolution asking for reciprocity between India and the colonies in the matter of emigration and it was carried.<sup>7</sup> Besant was deeply depressed to find that the Nationalists who were snuffed out of the Congress at the Surat Session (1907) were still out of that august political body. Since they formed a vital section of the Congress she resolved to direct her energies to healing the rift between the Moderate and the Extremist wings of the Congress. Besant was convinced that without a united Congress, India could never gain all the strength and inspiration needed for the attainment of *Swaraj*. And she did succeed in bringing the Nationalists back into the fold of the Congress. A woman of tremendous energy and will power, Besant was at the same time engaging herself also in laying the foundation of the Home Rule Movement. She toured all parts of India delivering stirring addresses to packed audiences on the necessity of working for Home Rule for India.

Besant tirelessly wrote in her own papers that India must have self-government after the war on the same footing as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other countries; must be governed by her own men freely elected by herself; have her own army and navy; levy her own taxes; frame her own budget; educate her people in her own way—in fine must become a sovereign nation within her own border, owing a notional allegiance to the British Crown.<sup>8</sup> This could not be secured without a clear and distinct demand addressed in the name of the country to the Imperial Government in Great Britain. As a first step public opinion in India must be created and then organised so as to justify such a huge demand being made. The Home Rule Movement aimed at creating the public opinion. She rightly argued that the British Government which expected co-operation and not confrontation from India at its hour of grave peril did not recognise a similar obligation resting on themselves. The other colonies did not have the same scruples as India in agitating or embarrassing the Government. They had declared what they wanted and the Secretary for Colonies had almost conceded it. India simply could not afford to seal her lips on this occasion, as a similar one would not arise for generations. For her praise-worthy contribution to the defence of the Empire, India must demand a *quid pro quo*. India must get England commit herself to granting her, her legitimate demand for a full measure of Home Rule immediately on the restoration of peace. It was only a price of her loyalty.

India was fit for self-government, Besant maintained and, if deemed unfit, Britain alone was to blame as she had failed to educate the people of India to govern themselves. She indicted the British rule for contributing to the penury of the masses by destroying the industries of India in order to boost the importation of cheap British goods. It encouraged the export of raw materials which came back as manufactured articles thus paralysing Indian industrial efforts for the benefit of Britain. It was the Cotton Excise that came for severe attack in her paper. She denounced it as “protection” for the foreigner. When the Government of India, driven by financial necessity, wanted to levy small import taxes on cotton cloth, the Parliament under pressure from the “Lancashire Cotton Lords” would permit it only if an equivalent excise duty was levied on cloth produced in Indian mills.<sup>9</sup>

The British impoverished India also by their extremely costly administration. Europeans were employed in the highest posts at the highest salaries and were introduced everywhere as “experts”. They were also very well pensioned so that they could live comfortably on Indian money when they retired to England. This made for a huge annual drain on the Indian economy. The proposed Home Rule Movement would demand the replacement of these men by Indians, reduction of taxes and simultaneous increase in expenditure on nation-building services and activities.<sup>10</sup>

In the sphere of Civil Service, the Home Rulers were highly critical of Britain’s consistently turning a deaf ear to the Congress plea for conducting simultaneous examinations for recruitment to the Indian Civil Service. Even the House of Commons passed a resolution in 1892 in its favour. But nothing was done by Britain in this direction. By such procrastination Britain deprived India of what she pretended to give her—a fair and equal share in the Indian Civil Service. The sequel was the confinement of the Indian Civil Service to Englishmen only. The Home Rulers wanted the appointment by competitive examination to be open to all subjects of the Empire alike, but they demanded the conduct of the examinations in India through the Indian vernaculars. Under the prevailing rules Indians could enter the services only at a heavy cost of going to England to obtain the “English degrees”.

Britain’s refusal to separate the executive and judicial functions of the State which the Congress had been demanding for more than three decades also came under fire. The Home Rulers strongly disapproved of the practice of Revenue Officers trying cases at the



end of a tiring day and of the peripatetic Court going about dispensing justice.

Besant once made this capsule statement “Better bullock carts and freedom than a *train de luxe* with subjection”. Elaborating it in *India: Bond or Free* she wrote: “It is not a question whether the rule is good or bad. German efficiency in Germany is far greater than English efficiency in England; the Germans were better fed, had more amusements and leisure, less crushing poverty than the English. But would any Englishman therefore desire to see Germans occupying all the highest positions in England? Why not? Because the righteous self-respect and dignity of the free men revolt against foreign domination, however superior”.<sup>11</sup>

Besant’s very entry into politics irked many of her own countrymen in India who had no doubt that her *New India* vilified everything British. It was deemed unpardonable for an English Woman to propagate in a foreign country that the British rule was cruel and oppressive. The spell of her charismatic personality on the Indian masses was an eye-sore to many. Her hold especially over the rural poor was so strong that an Englishman complained that the “old warm friendliness which had previously greeted visitors to Indian villages and which I myself always experienced was giving place to a chilly air of suspicion”.<sup>12</sup>

### *The Home Rule League :*

Besant planned to form a Home Rule League with two sections—Indian and English. Dadabhai Naoroji agreed to be the General President. William Wedderburn headed the English section and S. Subramania Iyer,\* the Indian Section. Wedderburn favoured her idea of the League and so did some other statesmen in England with whom Besant had been corresponding for some months.

Starting the Home Rule League proved a tough task for Besant. No doubt, a large and influential section of the public greatly favoured it. But Besant was keen to have her ideal accepted by the Congress. She was most desirous to have the propaganda work undertaken directly by the Congress or under its authority. When Besant propounded the scheme of Home Rule at a private meeting with some leaders at Bombay in September 1915, none but Jinnah\*\*

\*Besant’s first choice was Pherozeshah Mehta but he would have none of it. The reasons therefor are anybody’s guess.

\*\*An astute Lawyer; founder of Pakistan.

and Petit\* received it with favour.<sup>13</sup> In the Presidency of Madras, many Congressmen opposed it on the plea that none owing allegiance to the Congress should attempt to rise over it and do things independently. The “game she (Besant) is playing is fraught with mischief”, wrote a reputed editor. Those who were strongly prejudiced against Besant and viewed with suspicion whatever had emanated from her declared that self-government was within their reach even without a Home Rule League. Many held that it was for the Indian National Congress and not for Besant to appoint a Committee to secure Home Rule for India or authorise the establishment of a League for the purpose. The two main objections of the opponents of the proposed League had been the apprehension that it might diminish the influence of the Congress and that Besant, “an unsafe guide”, would assume the Chief Directorship of the League; and, the reluctance of the leaders with moderate views to her alliance with Tilak.<sup>14</sup> Tilak who was sentenced to 6 years’ imprisonment for some seditious articles in the *kesari* and was deported to Mandalay was freed in 1914. His release infused fresh life into the Nationalist Movement in Bombay where a sister organisation—the Maharashtra Home Rule League was started on 1 May 1916. This League was very virile and active. Besant saw the advantage of coming to an agreement with Tilak. They had also to decide the spheres of influence of the two organisations: the Home Rule League of Tilak and that of her own. This re-entry of Tilak and his party into public life was unpalatable to men of moderate views. After the Surat imbroglio the general impression was that Tilak would not work with anybody peacefully unless he was the master, and that it was his personal ambition that wrecked the Congress itself, leave alone his own political career.

Though Besant was a little disappointed after the Bombay meet, she did not lose heart. She was sanguine that she could enlist some of the “younger spirits”. When she sensed that there was a deep difference of opinion among many of her own friends, Besant was quick to allay their fears. She declared that the League would be an auxiliary of the Congress. The mere idea of a Home Rule would be mooted first and the League would then work for the scheme of autonomy to be approved by the very next session of the Congress. In the *New India* of 25 September, 1915, she wrote: “It has been decided to start a Home Rule League with ‘Home Rule in India’

\* A leading representative of the business community in India.



as its only object, as an auxiliary of the National Congress here and its British Committee in England, the special function of the League being to educate the English in democracy in relation to India. . . . ” This statement also aimed at convincing the Secretary of State for India, the British Parliament and Public opinion that the proposals transmitted by the Government of India to the Secretary of State for political reform in India were inadequate. As to confining the membership of the League to Congressmen only, she rightly felt that such a policy would keep out Mohammadans. She was anxious to take in not only Mohammadans but also a party of youngmen in the country, believed by her to be numerous, who had no enthusiasm for Congress but would gladly give their energies to a fresh movement for self-government. Though she was by no means anxious to take Tilak, she had no fear of his influence in the League even if he should join it. She was confident that she could contain him and keep him out of the executive altogether. As for the impact of such an event on the Congress’s friends in England, she affirmed that the latter’s politics were altogether more robust; surely a man like Tilak who had suffered for the country would be welcomed into any organisation as an invaluable asset, even though he had been convicted of rebellion and of waging a war against the British sovereign.

And Besant did succeed in getting many leaders of consequence join her “virile political movement” which was strictly loyal and constitutional and which sought “exclusively to promote the greatest political dream of India”. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, Vaze, Limaye and certain other Moderates saw in joining the League an additional advantage. They hoped to convince the Mohammadans that if they joined a League whose one object was achieving colonial self-government, there should be no hesitation for them to join the Congress which had that very object in the forefront of its programme, though it had many smaller ones besides.

Besant sent a circular on 27 September 1915 inviting the leading members of the Congress and the Muslim League to a conference at Bombay which was to be held before the next Congress session in December 1915. This conference, which was held on the Christmas day of 1915 with Surendranath Banerjee presiding, was more a private gathering. There were about 200 persons present who were members of the AICC and the Muslim League and the signatories to the invitation of 27 September. The establishment of a Home Rule League and its plan of operation were discussed. P.C. Mitter’s

amendment to Besant's scheme that it should be referred to the Congress and the Muslim League was ultimately accepted by Besant after much persuasion. The National Congress, which met a few hours later, practically accepted the scheme but the subjects' committee asked for time to finalise the plan of operation. Besant was obliged to accept the decision of the Congress to stay the starting of the All-India Home Rule League until September 1916—the time limit required by the Executive Committee, much to the disappointment of many ardent Home Rulers who were anxious to start it immediately.

However, the Congress Executive Committee failed to make their final decision before the deadline set by them. Besant started the Home Rule League as an independent organisation. The first meeting of the League was held on 3 September 1916. Besant was made its President, G.S. Arundale its organising secretary, C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer one of the General Secretaries, and B.P. Wadia the Treasurer. The rules prescribed in its constitution for organising branches of the League were not stringent. Hence branches were quickly found at Adyar, Kumbakonam, Madanapalli, Madurai, Calicut, Ahmedabad, Allahabad, Benares, Bombay and Cawnpore. Ere long there were as many as 200 branches, all enjoying virtual autonomy. Communications with the headquarters were carried on either through individuals who were active or through *New India* wherein a page was devoted to Home Rule News and advice.<sup>15</sup> The League preached everywhere *swadeshi*, boycott of foreign goods, temperance, national education, labour welfare and responsible government.

### *Confrontation with Government:*

The Movement brought Besant immense popularity and fame and elevated her to the position of an important national leader in the country. Even her worst detractors marvelled at her steadfast devotion and struggle to achieve freedom for India.

Besides writing strident articles in her papers, Besant also published books and pamphlets passionately advocating self-rule for India and denouncing the policy of the Imperial Government, inciting thereby the latter's wrath. The Manifesto of the Home Rule League stated its object to be "strong, steady and sustained agitation".<sup>16</sup> Pentland, Governor of Madras, would have no such confrontation with the Home Rulers. Dreading the result of sur-



rendering to the cry of Home Rule for India he strongly deprecated any political discussion at a time when the whole strength of India should be focussed upon the War and upon helping the British Empire. It was simply impossible for him to tolerate the public excitement which the Home Rule Movement was fomenting against the British Government by its inflammatory language in discussing political questions in the midst of a global war. He knew that under the Press Act of 1910 his government could proceed against Besant for damaging the British image in India by her scurrilous writings. But the government could not control her activity on the platform from which she exercised an influence not confined to Madras alone. Pentland also knew only too well that although Besant was not without opponents, her followers in the political, religious and educational fields were prominent men and that even those who differed from her views, recognised her stupendous labours and her love for India. Her role, for instance, in the founding of the Hindu University at Benaras was such that a special provision was made in the Bill by the Governor General-in-Council to secure for her a place in the controlling body of that institution. Keeping these in mind, the Madras Government sent a letter couched in a mild language hoping that a friendly remonstrance would secure the discontinuance of objectionable writings.<sup>17</sup> The Government also wanted to avoid the excitement, ill-feeling and agitation which an action under the Press Act would cause. Besant replied courteously to this letter promising to try to avoid contentious topics.

The resolution of the Lucknow Congress of December 1916 gave a further impetus to Besant's Movement. Though the word "Home Rule" was not used, the Congress "unanimously put its seal upon the Home Rule Movement". It further recognised the Home Rule League as part of itself when it called upon the Home Rulers along with the Congress committees to carry on the "educative and propaganda work of the Congress".

Besant therefore showed no sign of softening her vitriolic pen or tongue. Her astounding speech delivered the previous year at the Madras Provincial Conference held at Nellore was considered by all members of the Executive Council hostile and calculated to spread disaffection against the government. The Madras Government opined that the best way to check her "reckless" activities both in the press and on the platform would be to forbid her under the Defence of India Rules to remain in British India. Since the Government of India alone had the power to do this Pentland

wrote to Viceroy Hardinge, urging that Besant should be deported till the end of the war. In one of his private letters to the Secretary of State for India in 1917 Pentland bluntly wrote that if the Home Rule Movement were allowed to go on, “we here in Madras, powerless to stop it may be forced into one repressive measure after another”.<sup>18</sup> But the Government of India did not take action. It was in favour of waiting for the next Congress session where it expected the matter to take a new turn. It, however, suggested that the Madras Government could proceed against her under the Press Act of 1910.<sup>19</sup> But the latter hesitated, feeling perhaps that Besant herself would welcome such a move on their part as that would earn her a large measure of sympathy and an appreciable increase in her popularity. The hesitation on the part of the Government evoked pungent remarks from the opponents of Home Rule. One such was T. M. Nair’s sarcasm that it was her white skin that saved Besant.

The organs of the non-Brahman party made vile and obscene attacks on Besant. *The Dravidan* published ten highly invective couplets calling Besant *Malai Annai*—the woman on the mount. It was said that “The word of *Annai* is full of peril while the word of *Avvai* is full of wisdom. *Avvai* though a woman has clearly said, ‘Hear not the words of women’”. But such revilements hardly had any impact on Besant. When her attention was drawn to some of the accusations made against her by the *Justice*, she replied that they “injure justice, not me”. She knew that in their fury at the success of the Home Rule Movement the Government and the loyalist party would injure her as far as they would be allowed to do so. “No country would be freed without some persons suffering. Why not I?” she asked.<sup>20</sup> Nair’s incriminating writings to damage her reputation thus proved damp squibs. They might have delighted Besant’s enemies but did not deter men like Rabindranath Tagore, A. Subramania Iyer and others from choosing her to be the President of the Indian National Congress in December 1917.<sup>21</sup>

As she continued to wield her powerful pen defiantly against the Government, action was taken against her under the Press Act. On 26 May 1916, at the instance of the Government Solicitor, the chief presidency magistrate issued an Order calling upon Besant to deposit a security of Rs.2000/- within 14 days. Besant paid it in person and submitted a letter to the Chief Presidency Magistrate describing her contribution as a kind of forced loan, such as was familiar in Great Britain in Stuart days. She was “puzzled”, as she



did not know herself against what she had to pay the "security". It could not be against the "advocacy" of violence which had never sullied the pages of the *New India*. Nor could it be against Home Rule, for that was proclaimed by the late viceroy to be a legitimate aspiration. She wrote "I am deprived of the knowledge granted to the meanest criminal of the nature of his offence and thus of the opportunity of avoiding it in future. . . . I assert that to withhold from me the knowledge of my supposed offence . . . is a denial of justice".<sup>22</sup> In her appeal to the Viceroy, she desired him to enquire into the case and take cognizance of its grave effect on Anglo-Indian relations. She refused to change or modify the tone of her paper with regard to Home Rule. To quote her own words: "I am branded as a seditionist. I should indeed be guilty of sedition, if for cowardly fear of further punishment at the hands of Government, I shrank from urging the change which alone can prevent the disruption of the empire".<sup>23</sup>

The action of the Madras Government in putting fetters on expression of public opinion provoked strong protests. Harold Stuart, senior member of the Executive Council was the target of attack from certain quarters. It was about this time that he retired and a grand farewell party was arranged by some leaders in Madras to honour Stuart. When a certain correspondence had to be published in *The Hindu* in this connection, Kasturiranga Iyengar said, without mincing words, that a man of Stuart's abilities had not risen to the height of his opportunities as an influential member of the Executive Council while dealing with Besant's paper. "I wish he had not taken on the eve of his departure the severe measures that have been taken against *New India*".<sup>24</sup>

There were meetings condemning the Madras Government and fund-raising campaigns began in Besant's favour all over India. S. Subrahmania Iyer, a person of great legal acumen and a prominent Home Ruler, characterised the application of the *Press Act* to *New India* as a deliberate act to stifle the voice of the Home Rule Movement. The Government's act created an impression on the public mind that it was out to undermine the influence of an English woman of magnetic personality and generous instincts, who by her Home Rule Movement had given a powerful stimulus to the cause of *Swaraj* for India. The leading newspapers of Madras published innumerable letters condemning the Government's action. The *Hindu* commented adversely on the refusal of a railway bookstall owned by a European firm to sell copies of *New India* and

of the Principal of the Forest College in Coimbatore to invite a representative of that paper to cover a college function. The same paper also took to task the Bombay Government under Willingdon which served Prohibitory order on Besant through the Madras Government, banning her entry to their Presidency on the ground that her activities were prejudicial to the public safety under Rule 3 of the Defence of India Rules.<sup>25</sup> A little later the Government of the United Provinces also banned her entry to its Province. But the various prohibitory orders only served to increase the circulation of *New India* which was replete with spicy news.

Editors of five Madras newspapers\* who were members of the Madras Branch of the Press Association, moved the Secretary, Press Association of India, Bombay, to take necessary steps in this matter.<sup>26</sup> The *Madras Mail* was the sole paper which defended the action of the Madras Government in demanding the security as absolutely correct.

The agitation for Home Rule was steadily gaining in scope and strength and the virulence of Besant's anti-British Campaign continued unabated. Two of the notable books which she published during this period were *How India wrought for freedom* and *India — A Nation*. She also issued 10,000 copies each of two leaflets on "Self Government". Her speeches also disturbed the government considerably. To a friend who expressed concern about the treatment meted out to her and her paper she wrote, "I am still alive and so is *New India*. 'Threatened men live long' they say. But for all they (the Government) can do, India will win Home Rule".<sup>27</sup>

On 25 August 1916 an exasperated Madras Government declared the security deposited by Besant in her capacity as "Keeper of *New India* printing works" forfeited, and ordered the deposit of a fresh security of Rs.10,000/- with the District Magistrate of Chingleput. Harold Stuart who was responsible for "deceiving" the Indian members of the Imperial Council "pretending" that the Press Act would never be used except against editors stirring up murder and violence, signed the order for forfeiting *New India's* Security. Besant described him to be a part of a bad system using his autocratic powers badly.<sup>28</sup> To an Indian friend of hers, who invited Besant to the function to honour Harold Stuart, her reply

\*Kasturiranga Iyengar of *The Hindu*, C. Karunakara Menon of the *Indian Patriot*, G.A. Natesan of the *India Review*, C. Harisarvottama Rao of the *Andhra Patrika* and A. Rangaswamy Iyengar of the *Swadesamitran*.



was "...I am free born and bow to no coercionist. So long as Indians do not resent coercive legislation, but flatter those who resort to it, and do them honour, there is little hope of India's freedom".<sup>29</sup>

The high-handed action of the Madras Government was vehemently criticised all over India both in the public and in the press. Malaviya, Sapru, Sinha and others spoke indignantly against the forfeiture of the first security and the imposition of a fresh one on Besant. As many as 70 papers (English and vernaculars) commented on the impropriety of declaring the deposit forfeited. Besant paid the second security of Rs.10,000/- under protest on 4 September 1916. Besant's action in paying the security was generally endorsed as the total disappearance of *New India* would have been a "grave loss to the journalistic world and to Indian public life".<sup>30</sup>

On 6 September, Besant filed a petition in the High Court of Madras challenging the order of the Madras Government in declaring her previous deposit forfeited. The Government moved the advocate General S. Srinivasa Iyengar to convince the Court that its action was based entirely on her persistent hostile campaign against the British Government through the Press and not against her free discussions of political problems like the grant of Home Rule for India.<sup>31</sup> The sentence—"Fortified by the advice of our Advocate General, we have now under consideration the advisability of taking further proceedings under Press Act against *New India*" found in Pentland's letter to the Viceroy before demanding the second security from the paper, confirms the role of the Advocate General in this episode.<sup>32</sup>

In response to Besant's application for grant of leave for appeal, a special Bench of the High Court was constituted to hear her petition on 16 March 1917. It held that the order was made "in excess of the power conferred on the Magistrate". According to it, out of the 14 extracts of her articles which were considered seditious, only two were really so. But the Bench adjudged that there was no provision in the Press Act itself which would empower them to quash the Government Order. Besant's petition for permission to appeal to the Privy Council was dismissed.<sup>33</sup>

But the Home Rule Movement was the least affected by any of the restraints. On the other hand, it was gaining in intensity, with the prominent citizens of Madras like V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, T.V. Seshagiri Iyer and G.A. Natesan throwing in their lot with Besant. Institutions like the YMIA, the Ramakrishna Mission and the

Madras Mahajana Sabha also supported her.<sup>34</sup> The students were also enthused and their aid and sympathy enlisted. A. Rangaswamy Iyengar, Editor of *Swadesamitran* and nephew of Kasturiranga Iyengar, translated into Tamil Besant's *How India wrought for freedom* and arranged for the printing of the leaflet "Reserved for Europeans" which were distributed to the student population. As a sequel college students in Madras as well as in the mofussil protested against the reservation of carriages for Europeans and Eurasians. They paraded the platforms in large numbers shouting "Damn the English".<sup>35</sup> Thus the Movement had also captured the imagination of the younger generation which had come under Besant's powerful spell. Home Rule meetings condemned the existing educational system as backward, reactionary and unpatriotic; hailed the students as the future hope of the nation as they had to secure for India liberation from the British yoke; organised Home Rule classes for them; and formed boy scouts and volunteers troops for them. The Theosophical Society was now explicitly involving itself in political activities. Since all great National Movements in India were rooted in religion, argued Besant, the Indian Home Rule Movement could not be an exception to this rule.<sup>36</sup> In fine, Besant easily succeeded in her effort to seek for Home Rule an emotional youth support.

Alarmed of students becoming the backbone of the Home Rule Movement in Madras, Pentland's Government passed a Government Order forbidding students from involving themselves in political agitations.<sup>37</sup> In his address to the Legislative Council on 24 May 1917, Pentland bluntly said that the League's propaganda for self-government was "beyond the range of practical politics". He admonished that if Besant and her "comrades-in-arms" did not abandon the Home Rule agitation, he would resort to sharp, stern measures. He also attacked vehemently the Congress-League Scheme and the Memorandum of the "Nineteen"\*. To quote Ranga Iyer: "The Congresswalas, Muslim Leaguers, Home Rulers, Tilakites, Hindu Sabhaites, *et hoc genus omne* protested in a voice of thunder against the Madras Satrap's *ipse dixit* that all thought or talk of early Home Rule must be forthwith abandoned. It was obvious that India's bile was roused".<sup>38</sup> Particularly, his threat of stern measures against Besant exposed Pentland to severest criticism.

\**Infra* Chapter Five.



“If, as promised, there is repression of the League and humiliation of its members, then, I fear His Excellency will be throwing the Presidency in a state of excitement”, wrote K.V. Rangaswamy Iyengar. He urged that a leader like C. Vijayaraghavachariar should hold a meeting to condemn the Governor’s speech and to declare that they would all risk everything rather than allow the Home Rule Movement to be crushed or its leaders humiliated \*.<sup>39</sup> S. Subrahmanya Iyer sent a communication to the Press stating that he accepted gladly the Hony. Presidentship of the Home Rule League because he believed that the early establishment of Home Rule was vital for the welfare of the country and the stability of the Empire. He said “I cannot retrace my steps. I will not resign my office even if the League be declared unlawful . . . to defend Home Rule is to me a civic duty and this duty I will discharge. I call on you countrymen to do the same”. He also warned Pentland that if the Madras Government did proceed against Besant, he for one, would seek all constitutional remedies open to him to get the government orders reversed. But Pentland ignored the warning, treating Iyer’s letter as the “impetuous manifestation of his fanaticism for theosophy”.<sup>40</sup>

Amidst wild rumours of impending coercive policy in the Press, and of further action to put her out of the field of public activity, Besant addressed the following letter “To my Brothers and Sisters of India” on 13 June 1917:

“My real public life dates from my first public lecture on the political status of women, for the Co-operative Institute in August 1874.

“Since then my life has been given wholly to the service of the public, as I have seen service, so that the deprivation of the liberty to render services is the greatest loss that can befall me. I know that the selfish and the unpatriotic cannot realise this, but those who have a similar *dharma*, they will understand. Apart from the joy of service, life has no attraction for me, save the happiness that flows from a few deep and personal attachments. To surrender liberty and (lose) touch with those I love is to me worse than death. But to live free and with them, a coward and dishonoured, a traitor to *Dharma* and to India, would be hell. I take the easier path”.<sup>41</sup>

\* C. Vijayaraghavachari gave but lukewarm support to the agitation against the internment of Besant as he felt that the leaders were injuring the great cause of their country in their “excitement and sympathy for particular favourites”.

On 16 June 1917, i.e., the day Besant was silenced and interned for doing the educative propaganda about the Congress—League Scheme, she had an interview with the Governor of Madras. The latter wanted to have a straight talk with her, before taking action. It would be of interest to recall some portions of this memorable interview between two striking personalities which took place at midday at the Government House. Throughout the interview, Pentland talked to Besant politely like “an English country gentleman to a highly respected lady”.<sup>42</sup>

*Pentland:* I have come down from Ooty, Mrs. Besant, in order to show my great consideration for you and to speak to you myself and give you opportunity for consideration.

*Besant:* What am I to consider?

*Pentland:* That is for you to decide, Mrs. Besant. You may ask me for time to consider and see me again tomorrow. You might like to consult your friends.

*Besant:* The only two people I shall consult will be Sir Subrahmanian and C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer and as we know each other's opinion, I don't see what would be gained by consulting.

(Besant then asked Pentland for what reason she was to be interned).

*Pentland:* I cannot discuss that Mrs. Besant.

*Besant:* In the Supreme Council, Sir Raginold Craddock stated that none was interned without a full statement of the offence for which he was interned, and without being given a full opportunity for explanation or defence. I did not think at the time that it was true because some of my own friends had gone and I know that they had no such opportunity. But I am very grateful to your Excellency for proving it to be false.

*Pentland:* I cannot discuss it, Mrs. Besant.

(Besant made it absolutely clear that she did not regret anything that she wrote or said, and so she had nothing to withdraw or to explain).

*Besant:* I have heard it said that your Excellency was going to offer me the alternative of going to England.

*Pentland:* For the period of the war. I will give you a safe conduct to England to take you through.

*Besant:* I do not intend to go to England. We all understand from your Excellency's speech that you object to the Congress programme and that is identical to the programme of the Home Rule League.

*Pentland:* I cannot re-open the subject Mrs. Besant.



*Besant*: The Home Rule League is simply supporting the congress programme.

When she read out from the Congress programme, Pentland said: I don't know what that is.

*Besant*: It is the Reform Resolution passed by the Congress.

*Pentland*: I have not seen that. . . . You must understand that we shall stop all your activities.

*Besant*: I suppose so. I suppose I ought to say to your Excellency that at the present time the Madras Presidency is absolutely quiet and untroubled. Your proposed action will turn it into a condition of turmoil like that of Bengal.

*Pentland*: I cannot discuss that Mrs. Besant.

Besant was evidently getting irritated at these replies. She rose up saying that since Pentland had no proposals to make and she had none, she did not want to waste his time. Walking with her to the door, the Governor said: "I wish you to consider, Mrs. Besant, that we cannot discriminate and the whole of your activities will be stopped."

*Besant*: You have all the power and I am helpless. You must do what you like. But just one thing . . . I believe that you are striking the deadliest blow against the British Empire in India . . . as you are acting as the Governor, I have no personal feeling against your Excellency.

### *The Internment:*

In a most touching letter penned immediately after the interview, and left with Kasturiranga Iyengar, Besant appealed to her innumerable followers thus:

"I write plainly, for this is my last word. I go into enforced silence and imprisonment, because I love India and have striven to arouse her before it was too late. It is better to suffer than to consent to do wrong. It is better to lose liberty than to lose honour. I am old, but I believe, that I shall see India win Home Rule before I die. If I have helped ever so little to the realisation of that glorious hope, I am more than satisfied. God save India! *Vande Mataram*".

The following are excerpts from her *Internment Diary*: "My life unbroken since 1874 was arbitrarily ended, by the fiat of Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras and his Executive Council—Sir Alexander Cardew, Mr. Gillman and Mr. P. Rajagopalachariar. And this was done by the use of a war measure, twisted to the purpose of sweeping clauses of the Indian Penal Code on sedi-

tion. . . . England under the eyes of Europe and America dramatically releases the Irish Prisoners, many of them held for armed rebellion, on the very day—June 16th—on which she interned three persons in India, who acting under the mandate of the National Congress and the Muslim League have asked for domestic reforms. History will note the contrast between profession and practice”.<sup>43</sup>

About an hour after the interview, Besant and her colleagues in the political and journalistic world G.S. Arundale and B.P. Wadia were interned by the Governor, in exercise of section 3 of Defence of India Rules, 1915. The order said that “there was reasonable ground for believing that Mrs. Besant has acted and is about to act in a manner prejudicial to the public safety”. The orders forbade them to make speeches, attend meetings and publish or procure the publication of any writing or speech composed by them but to remain confined to the hills of Ootacamund, which was the area the internees chose out of the six suggested by the Government. As per the original orders all the three were authorised to live together in the same place of internment, under police control and censorship. Later, the Government thought better of it and wanted to intern the three in different places. But its second thought having come long after the first, the Government could not implement it. Pentland’s Government little realised that by making a martyr of Besant through its own order it was indirectly giving an added impetus to her cause.

Pentland persecuted not only Besant and her close associates but also her staff and their relatives. On 19 June 1917 an order was served on one Narayana Sadashiv Maratha of Poona who had taken up residence at Adyar, to leave the Presidency within forty-eight hours. Sadashiv was connected with the Indian Revolutionary Party both in Germany and in America. It was considered unsafe to allow him to remain in Madras. On 1 August, the Madras Government directed his son Karandikar, who was on the staff of *New India* to leave the Presidency under Rule (3) of the Defence of India (Consolidation) Rules, 1915. The charges against him were: he was touring the mofussil districts, preaching *Swadeshism*; forming branches of the Home Rule League to stir up ill-feeling over the internment; and causing disturbance to public tranquility. Besant who anticipated these orders, had made all the necessary arrangements for carrying on her work in her absence. She handed her *New India* to the care of P.K. Telang.



After internment Besant, Pentland wrote to Austen Chamberlain that what was urgently needed was an authoritative declaration from His Majesty's Government that no decision whatever would be made regarding the political future of India until the end of the war and without full consideration of all opinions entitled to be heard.<sup>44</sup> Questions were raised in the House of Commons about the internment but the official replies to them were callous. Austen Chamberlain, a "conservative nerveless politician" stated that though he was not consulted about the internment, he approved the action of the Madras Government as Besant was engaged in a dangerous political agitation which might even be disastrous to India. He also said that he was not disposed to question the propriety of the Madras Government's Order forbidding students to attend public meetings. The Madras Government had informed him that it was made in the interests of education and of the students themselves in the context of the persistent attempts of the Home Rulers to bring them under the influence of an "undesirable political propaganda".<sup>45</sup>

On another occasion, in the House of Commons, answering a question as to whether an order declaring the Home Rule League seditious was in prospect in Madras or elsewhere, Chamberlain emphasised that Local Governments in India would not repress Associations whose programmes and methods were constitutional. When further asked if the Movement headed by Besant was outside the constitution, he replied that her agitation was not merely mischievous, but was carried on by "improper methods".<sup>46</sup>

Again on 11 July 1917 at the House of Commons, Chamberlain grossly misrepresented Besant by misreading a telegram of the Government of India. The Government of Madras, in its order of 3 July 1917, informed the three internees of its decision to "relax the orders issued against them by permitting the publication of purely theosophical or religious writings or speeches composed by them provided that such speeches had been previously examined and passed for publication by the Governor-in-Council himself or by such officer as he might appoint". All the three internees declined the offer as inconsistent with their principles. Besant wrote that "the Theosophical Society has in this struggle allied itself in *Entente Cordial* with the National Congress, the Muslim League and the Home Rule League in one solid body, united in resistance to autocracy and in defence of the liberty of the people, and I, as President of the Theosophical Society, will conclude no separate

peace". But Chamberlain misinformed the House of Commons that Besant had sent a violently worded reply to the Madras Government refusing its offer to permit her to carry on Theosophical work on condition that she abstained from political agitation! Besant instantly wired the Prime Minister charging Chamberlain with making false statement and demanding immediate publication of her letter unmutilated in the interests of justice.<sup>47</sup>

This very last act of Chamberlain as Secretary of State for India justified the tradition of "know-nothingness" which had been built round him. Always inaccurate, "in this instance his inaccuracy is so misleading and of such a glaring nature" that his conduct was adjudged to be "more culpable than that for which he has received the censure of Mesopotamian Commission", commented the *Amrit Bazar Patrika*.<sup>48</sup>

Ere long, the campaign against the Madras Government's action spread to other parts of the country. Besant's internment became the talk of all freedom-loving people. Angry meetings were organised all over India against this "unconstitutional act of aggression upon Indian constitutional agitation as typified in Mrs. Besant". Bomanji, a well-known Parsi Contractor of Bombay and life member of the Bombay Home Rule League donated Rs.1,00,000 to enable that League to resist attacks against the aims and objects of the League.<sup>49</sup>

At Lucknow, the All-India Muslim League passed a resolution protesting against the utterances and action of Pentland as entirely subversive of the political ideals of the League. The resolution also urged upon the Government of India to acknowledge the necessity of a complete disavowal of the internment orders.<sup>50</sup>

Malaviya had a long interview with the Viceroy, the Home member and the Home Secretary to get the release of Besant and her lieutenants. But they showed no inclination to interfere with the orders of the Madras Government. However, when the Viceroy expressed that he was not opposed to agitation for Home Rule altogether, Malaviya requested him to issue a circular. The circular should prevent any local government from interfering with any agitation conducted on constitutional lines and also cancel the extension of the prohibition against attending political meetings to college students.<sup>51</sup>

Gandhiji paid the highest tribute to Besant when he said that she had brought the Home Rule within the consciousness of every Indian village, let alone towns and cities within a short time. On



7 July, he addressed a letter to the Viceroy stating that the internments “are a big blunder. . . . . I plead with all the earnestness I can command for the boldest policy i.e., to acknowledge the blunder in the frankest manner and to withdraw the orders of internment and to declare that the country has the right to carry on any propaganda that is not subversive of the British constitution and is totally free from violence”.<sup>52</sup> Gandhiji’s plan was that if his solemn advice went unheeded and Besant and Company were not set at liberty before 31 July, passive resistance should begin i.e. young men should go to villages and preach Home Rule as far as possible in the language of Besant, so that the Government might intern and imprison many. If the Government did not do this, they should go to Ootacamund, get Besant disobey the order of Internment and challenge the Government to further repression. It almost looked as if the whole of India was on the brink of a revolution.<sup>53</sup>

The Government of India was certainly alarmed at the repercussions that followed the internment. In fact, Maffey, the private secretary to the Viceroy who was credited with great influence, was in mortal anxiety to get Besant out. The Viceroy too appeared to be nearly so, but the Home Member, William Vincent, insisted on some definite undertakings from the three internees as a prerequisite for their release. Maffey even suggested a deputation with Srinivasa Sastri as a member to wait immediately on Pentland, of course, after getting the approval of William Vincent. Sastri found the latter “polite enough but absolutely uncommunicative”. Obviously William Vincent was not happy about Sastri and others meddling in the matter.<sup>54</sup>

Even Jinnah worked hard for Besant’s release, although there was a personal motive behind his gesture. Jinnah’s letter to Besant was to the following effect: “The Rajah of Mahmudabad is exerting himself very much to get you released. He is a true friend of ours. He is also trying to get a general amnesty for all political prisoners. One small thing, however, is necessary and Rangaswamy Iyengar will mention it to you in person, or communicate it in writing”.<sup>55</sup> Iyengar’s letter to Besant was to this effect. “Jinnah is exerting himself very much in your behalf, but he wants a letter from you addressed to him and to be shown to Government saying that you would, after release abstain from unconstitutional agitation and revolutionary propaganda. . . . . I consulted Malaviyaji on this matter. He considers that you should not write any such letter. My opinion is that you may reply to Jinnah saying that as he knows

your methods to be perfectly peaceful and constitutional he may himself give Government the necessary assurance without a written declaration from you".<sup>56</sup>

It was palpably evident that Jinnah and Mahmudabad were anxious to have the monopoly of credit in the release of Besant and to exploit the gratitude of the released to secure her abdication of the Congress Presidency in favour of Mahmudabad. It may be mentioned in passing that at a Provincial Congress Committee meeting held in August 1917, Srinivasa Sastri proposed Mahmudabad against Besant. But his proposal was defeated when 50 voted for Besant and 12 for Mahmudabad.<sup>57</sup> It was generally feared that if Jinnah's method succeeded he would assume intolerable airs and go about posing as a leader of the country and that the Muslim League would gain ascendancy over the Congress. But the *intelligentsia* were sanguine of two things: that Besant would refuse to give any assurance as to her future conduct, either directly to the Government or indirectly through Jinnah; and that the Government would be forced to release her before 19 September when Malaviya's resolution on the unlawful internment would be debated in the Imperial Council.

Only the anti-Besant Anglo-Indian section in the Presidency led by the *Madras Mail* persisted in their demand that Besant should not be released unless she foreswore her past actions. They were obviously unaware of what was going on in the official world. Such attitude on their part towards Besant "has been one of naked and unashamed journalistic depravity".<sup>58</sup> The Madras Mahajana Sabha cabled to the Secretary of State condemning the threat held out by the *Madras Mail* and appealing to him to end the prevailing tension.<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile Besant and her legal adviser David Graham Pole lodged a petition to the King-in-Council questioning the validity of the Defence of India Act. In her petition dated 31 July 1917, Besant stated that the High Courts of India did not possess ample jurisdiction to determine the validity of acts of the Indian Legislature and that her case should be referred to the Judicial Committee and the order of internment cancelled. The petition was referred to Montagu who dismissed her contention about the jurisdiction of the High Courts of India but said if she failed to obtain redress from the High Court of Madras, she could apply to the Privy Council in the usual manner. The King-in-Council conveyed the same to her rejecting her petition.<sup>60</sup>



The public was getting agitated over the poor health of Besant. She was seventy then and her health was adversely affected by the climate of Ootacamund and by the interruption of her usual habits of life. G.S. Arundale who was much perturbed about her failing health said that for Besant the internment was an illness threatening her very life. "Weaker and weaker she grew as the weeks went on, and hours passed when she sat in her chair gazing and gazing, but looking at nothing. She would begin a game of patience, continue for half an hour, and then suddenly stop and stare, as it would seem, into vacancy for an hour or more".<sup>61</sup>

The Madras Government knew that if her illness became serious, it would lead to dangerous public excitement. Yet, Pentland continued in a blunder which had already generated a feeling of deep resentment and disapprobation among a large section of thinking public in the country. Her internment at *Gulistan*, the cottage built by Col. Olcott, founder President of the Theosophical Society at Ootacamund only added to the anxiety of the Government. For, though her correspondence was under strict censorship, she was not prevented from seeing visitors. She had, therefore, an array of well-wishers from other parts of the Presidency. She made the Olcott Lodge a virtual centre of pilgrimage. Men like C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer and Pattabhi Sitaramayya were frequently visiting her for instruction and inspiration. Ere long, she got a flag staff bearing the Home Rule colours erected at *Gulistan*. This was followed by the formation of a local branch of the Home Rule League at Ootacamund.<sup>62</sup>

With her health failing miserably on the hills, Besant elected to have her residence shifted to Coimbatore. The Government of Madras gladly acquiesced in it feeling perhaps that she would be less troublesome there. But very soon, Besant made the entire district of Coimbatore a centre of special Home Rule activity. Many political workers came from outside the district also. The Home Rule flag was hoisted on her residence soon after her arrival but it was pulled down by the orders of the District Magistrate.<sup>63</sup> This only aggravated the public resentment against the Government. The Madras Government could not cope with the mass movement gathering momentum day by day throughout the Presidency. Overtaken by these developments, Pentland urged the Viceroy to consider the immediate deportation of Besant to England as "her opportunities for mischief at home will be infinitely less than they are here, even under the present limitations".<sup>64</sup> Her removal

would, no doubt, cause some public clamour but it would be short-lived, he contended. As for the other two interned, Pentland suggested that Arundale might considerately be given the option to accompany Besant as escort while Wadia might be released by the Madras Government and directed to return to his own native Presidency of Bombay.<sup>65</sup> The Madras Government thus remained stubborn refusing to do anything on its own to ease the tension which had been caused by its own action. It was not until it was compelled to reverse its order by the new Secretary of State that the Madras Government reconsidered its policy. It is worthwhile recalling here the prophetic statement made by a reputed columnist of those days about the Home Rule Movement: "Have you ever watched a tug-of-war between two well-matched teams? At first it is an even, prolonged pull, then comes the stage of pull devil, pull baker, each side obtaining a slight advantage and then follows—a long and strong pull on both sides—a giving away slowly on the weaker side and then give away altogether with a run. In that way will Home Rule come to India".<sup>66</sup>

Special mention deserves to be made of the crucial role of S. Subrahmania Iyer who gave up his knighthood as a protest against the internment. He devised a novel plan to whip up public interest in America towards the Indian situation. He took the extreme step of sending a letter to President Woodrow Wilson of USA requesting him to intervene and persuade the British government to grant Home Rule for India. The letter was sent through Hotchener, an American journalist staying in India with his wife. The Hotcheners were both Theosophists. It would appear that the letter to the President of America was endorsed by him to the British ambassador in USA who, in turn, passed it on to the British Minister. It is however generally held that the subsequent cancellation of the internments was not due to this communication. No doubt the procedure adopted by Subrahmania Iyer was open to question. It offended constitutional proprieties. But the letter clearly indicated how rudely public faith had been shaken by the action of the British bureaucracy. His stirring letter did contribute to the discontent in America with British statesmanship as was evident from President Wilson's sympathy with the Indian Nationalist Movement.<sup>67</sup> Subrahmania Iyer stated in the letter that the British officials "voted themselves exorbitant salaries and large allowances; they refuse us education; they sap us of our wealth; they impose crushing taxes without our consent; they cast thousands of our



people into prisons for uttering patriotic sentiments—prisons so filthy that often the inmates die from loathsome diseases”. He described the Indian Civil Servant as being “so subtle and clever that he would put into the shade a syndicate composed of Machiavalli, Li Hung Chang and Abdul Hamid. . . . .”.<sup>68\*</sup>

On 12 July Chamberlain resigned office following the publication of the Mesopotamian Commission’s Report which held him responsible for the mismanagement of the Mesopotamian campaign. On 20 August his successor Edwin Montagu made a historic announcement in the House of Commons on the British policy in India. The declaration was that the “policy of His Majesty’s Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible

\* On 20 December 1917 when Mani Iyer had an interview with Montagu and Chelmsford to submit his views on the Reforms Scheme during their visit to Madras, the Secretary of State “opened fire” most unexpectedly on this “violent” communication. It was a stormy interview. Montagu himself admits “I treated him rather harshly, but I was angry”. Mani Iyer retorted equally spiritedly that by his unwise action, Pentland had lost the confidence and attachment of men who were honoured and esteemed by his predecessors. This information was conveyed privately to Pentland by Chelmsford after the interview. Since Iyer was rebuked by both Montagu and Chelmsford, the Government of India did not think it worthwhile to take any further action. (Letter of the Government of India to Madras Government dt. 29 Jan. 1918). Though the incident was known in several quarters, the actual contents of Iyer’s letter were not known until the full text of it was published by Besant in the *New India* of 30 April 1918. This incited resentment in some quarters at the “immunity” which Iyer “enjoyed”. Feeling concerned, Pentland stated that the leniency which might have been expedient when Iyer’s conduct was an official secret could not be continued after it had become a public matter. (His letter to the Viceroy dt. 9 May 1918, *Chelmsford Papers*). Thereupon, Montagu raked up the issue in June 1918, denouncing Iyer’s action. It was not clear whether his strong remarks had reference to the contents of the letter or to the mode in which it was made to reach its destination. In his statement, there was a threat of some action against Iyer. This was resented by many Indian leaders who were friendly with Montagu, as such a statement would even prejudice the consideration of the Government’s Reforms proposals. (*Servants of India*, Vol. I, No. 18, pp.206-207 dt. 20 June 1918). Upon this, Iyer surrendered his titles and knighthood which caused a flutter of astonishment. (*Servants of India*, Vol. I, No. 20, p. 230, dt. 4 July 1918). Ultimately however, Montagu dismissed the whole episode as a “trifle”. He wrote to Pentland “I hope you share the view which commended itself to Chelmsford and to me that Iyer’s action should receive as little notice as possible. After all he is only among the second fiddles in his movement and it is never worthwhile wasting one’s heavy artillery on such” (His letter to Pentland dt. 13 August 1918, *Montagu papers*).

government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. They have decided that substantial step in this direction should be taken as soon as possible and that it is of the highest importance as a preliminary to considering what these steps should be that there should be a free and informed exchange of opinion between those in authority at home and in India". Montagu also announced that in pursuance of this policy he would shortly visit India to hold consultations with the Government of India and other official agencies.

A direct result of this declaration was to release Besant and her colleagues from all restrictions on their liberty, which was announced in the Imperial Legislative Council on 5 September 1917. In his letter to Pentland who was till the end not reconciled to the stand taken by Montagu, the latter says "After all, Besant could not have been interned for ever. . . . . ." "I notice that her paper *New India*, so far as I can judge by an extract forwarded to me by Chelmsford, promises good behaviour".<sup>69</sup>

In his telegram to Chelmsford, Montagu stated that there was a strong agitation in England on behalf of Besant producing its effect on those in Parliament and outside "who cannot be made to see that though the object of her policy is legitimate, the language which she uses is considered a public danger in Indian conditions. . . we can hardly keep her under restraint indefinitely".<sup>70</sup> The Viceroy, in his turn, informed Pentland that he agreed with the aforesaid arguments of Montagu.<sup>71</sup> As to the debate on the subject in the parliament, he said the new Secretary of State was "clearly not very convinced of the wisdom of our action in this case".<sup>72</sup> He desired Pentland to recognise that in such a matter, the considerations of Imperial policy must prevail. At the Imperial Legislative Council on 5 September, when Jinnah raised the question of her release, William Vincent replied that they would advise the Government of Madras to release the interned persons, if they were satisfied that the latter would abstain from violent and unconstitutional agitation.<sup>73</sup>

Friends of the Madras Government who were certain that Besant would never satisfy the precondition for release were preparing to oppose any attempt to bring about the release of the three without a definite and public assurance being given by her to the Government. Pentland who protested to the uttermost—short of tendering his resignation, ultimately gave in. The three internees were released on 17 September 1917 at 11 p.m. unconditionally, of course.



*The Release:*

The *communique* releasing Besant and her lieutenants said: "Having been informed that the Government are satisfied that the restrictions imposed on Mrs. Besant under Rule 3 of the Defence of India Consolidation Rules, 1915, may now be removed, the Madras Government have now resolved, in deference to the strong recommendation of the Government of India, to remove these restrictions".

Besant never gave any assurance of her future conduct. All that she did was to inform William Vincent of her ready co-operation in obtaining a calm atmosphere during the visit of Montagu. This was revealed by the Home Member at the Imperial Council while answering the query of Hugh Bray whether guarantees were received from Besant and her two companions.<sup>74</sup>

Besant was given an ostentatious welcome on her arrival with her co-workers at the Madras Central station on 21 September—three months after leaving it. Speaking of the impressive reception at the station and the procession from there to Adyar which baffled all description, *The Hindu* writes: "It was a spontaneous and whole-hearted welcome given to the venerable lady who has given of her best to the national cause by the leaders as well as the masses of the people. The magnificent reception was one which kings might well envy and it shows the political consciousness of the people and their deep sense of gratitude which is bred of national service rendered to them".<sup>75</sup>

Messages conveying their gratitude for ordering the release of the trio were sent by many organisations to the Secretary of State. Most of these telegrams and letters mentioned *inter-alia* the scathing leaders in the Anglo-Indian Press, denigrating the Secretary of State and the Viceroy for undermining the authority of the Governor in order to placate a "small irresponsible section of the people". According to the European community as well as the loyalists, the release by the Imperial Government of a woman who assailed the British in India as a whole, smirched the reputation of the entire British population in India; and the manner in which the release was announced and carried out was most hurtful to the prestige of the Governor and his colleagues who were directly responsible for the maintenance of peace in the Presidency.<sup>76</sup> Their grief was all the more poignant as the Viceroy also had not been "considerate" towards the Madras Government. Surely, they

expected the Viceroy to express his concurrence with the order of the Madras Government as Besant's activities inflamed the mind of a large part of the literate sections, and then to add gracefully that to create a peaceful atmosphere for Montagu, they recommended the release of the internees.

The comments of the *Madras Mail* which took the lead in this campaign, were a "journalistic outrage", going beyond the decencies of the journalistic code. Here are a few samples of their accusations of Montagu, who was dubbed a "wandering jew". The paper asserted that by his action in the case of Besant, Montagu had reduced every provincial Government in India to "impotence when threatened with agitation of the most illegitimate character". The release of Besant, wrote their London correspondent, "was evidently directed from London at the instigation of the Congress and the Muslim League, both small and unimportant bodies. For them, it is a triumph over the Madras Government and a very serious blow to our rule. They have sent a truculent and threatening manifesto that ought to have been instantly returned to them. In selecting Mrs. Besant to preside over the next Congress, they have shown defiance of Government".<sup>77</sup>

A few more samples of their vituperation:

"Montagu has alienated and alarmed the whole European community, and excited among the non-Brahmans of southern India grave apprehension of coming surrender on a large scale to a clique they dread. . . . .".<sup>78</sup>

"India can do without him (Montagu) as Secretary of State. . . . . We mean to use every legitimate method of bringing about his ejection from office. This policy is not anti-Indian; it is not a policy of hostility to reform; it is, however, the sole alternative to joining in the servile exhibitions which, as the *Pioneer* and the *Civil and Military Gazette* have well said, have disgusted every Englishman in the country".<sup>79</sup>

Thus the *Madras Mail* openly instigated certain non-official European leaders and conservative Indians to promote bad blood. All European officials were called upon to resign *en masse* so as to bring the administration to a standstill. The European community was urged to combine in helping the paper in the work of discrediting the Indian administration. The paper also sent a cable to Montagu asking him to change the mind of the Government of India and followed this up with a threat to launch a passive resistance campaign if its efforts to halt the reforms were to fail. In this vilifica-



tion campaign, the *Madras Mail* had the unstinted support of P.T. Chetty who also sent a cablegram to the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister opposing Home Rule and supporting the *Madras Mail's* standpoint.\*

The mischievous campaign of these reactionary elements gave rise to a deep widespread resentment in Madras. A public meeting held in Madras in November 1917, urged the Governments of Madras and India to take "effective action to maintain the authority, the prestige and respect due to the Secretary of State and the Viceroy from such unjust calumny". S. Subrahmania Iyer, one of the main organisers of the meeting made supreme efforts to make the visit of the Secretary of State smooth and his work easy. Yet, as discussed earlier, Montagu chose to treat him in the manner he did, causing the latter to throw away the knighthood and titles conferred on him.

Pentland continued to be hostile towards Besant. His officials behaved "petty" when she called at the Government House after her release in order to "let bygones be bygones". She was not also invited to the Garden Party got up in honour of Montagu during his visit to Madras in 1917. When this was brought to his notice, Montagu observed: "If I had been Pentland, I think I should have asked her to the Garden Party and sat her at tea between the Viceroy and myself: it would have been a pretty revenge".<sup>80</sup> Montagu was enormously enamoured of Besant, her appearance, her dress, her deportment and above all her "silvery quiet voice". He records the following in his diary after listening to the address she presented to him at Delhi on 26 November 1917 on behalf of the Home Rule League: "If only the Government had kept this old woman on our side! If only she had been well-handled from the beginning! If only her vanity had been appealed to . . . . ."<sup>81</sup>

With all the fuss and furore over her unconditional release Besant emerged out of the place of internment as a "veritable national hero". And the climax of her triumph came when hardly three months after her internment she was elected to the Presidency of the Indian National Congress that met at Calcutta in December 1917. That was the finest hour of her life when she "thundered" from her Presidential Chair that "India shall soon be seen, proud and self-reliant, strong and free, the radiant splendour of Asia, the light and blessing of the World".

\* *Supra* Chapter Two.

The President of the Congress for 1918 seemed destined to blossom out into a “tribune of the people for all time”.<sup>82</sup> But that was not to be.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

# Annie Besant—"A Startling Metamorphosis"

Annie Besant who almost became a martyr in the cause of the Indian Home Rule Movement and was elected in December 1917 to the highest position of honour in the snowballing Indian freedom movement mysteriously underwent a metamorphosis in the next few months. There was a diametrical change in her political attitude from a staunch pro-Indian orientation to a thorough pro-British one.

### *A Possible Cause:*

This sudden conversion of Besant from an irreconcilable and implacable opponent of British imperialism into an upholder of it, puzzled not a few of her own friends. Her changed attitude became known in the political circles only in the middle of 1918 and came into public view as late as 1919. But glimpses of her aggressive tactics were discernible even earlier. And there were occasions when some Nationalists of the Presidency even doubted the genuineness of her claim to be the doughty champion of India's independence.

The usual charges levelled against Besant were: inconsistency in her disposition towards the British Indian Government and a consistency in charging people opposed to her with sedition and incitement to violence. Her inconsistency made her the butt of severe criticism from those who had otherwise a great regard and admiration for her. Her stubborn refusal to see her opponent's view-point was born out of an obstinate desire that none should differ from her. This obstinacy cost her the friendship and goodwill of some leaders of consequence. In fact, the latter trait became evident as early as 1912-13, when she gave a political tinge to her defence against the voice of the people raised in condemnation of what was happening at the Adyar Theosophical Society. Her submission was that Narayaniah's suit\* was politically motivated

\* It was the sensational guardianship trial in Madras when J. Krishnamurti's father Narayaniah filed a suit seeking restitution of his two sons from Besant's custody.

because she had held back the student population of India from participation in the plots of the Extremists\* and had sought to inspire them with loyalty to the Empire. She averred that her life was threatened when she interfered to put an end to the secret drilling of boys and the collection of arms in Maharashtra during Curzon's viceroyalty<sup>1</sup>. In short, she contended that the plaintiff Narayaniah was used as a tool of this nefarious movement of Extremist persuasion<sup>2</sup>.

The advent of Mahatma Gandhi on the Indian political horizon disturbed her considerably. Gandhiji had endeared himself firmly to the masses of India. By spending over two decades of his youth in serving the cause of his countrymen in South Africa he demonstrated successfully to the world "the great spiritual strength underlying the principle of passive resistance".<sup>3</sup> Besant sensed a formidable rival in Gandhiji. Anticipating her eclipse by his charismatic personality, Besant nerved herself up for a decisive onslaught on him by leading a party of opposition to him. Her fear was not unfounded: for, the ascendancy of the Mahatma on the stage of Indian nationalism did mark the sinking of her political star within a year of her reaching the zenith of glory in 1917.

Besant launched her very first onslaught on Gandhiji about a year after his arrival from South Africa. It was the "Benares incident" which took place on the occasion of the founding of the Benares Hindu University on 6 February 1916. Gandhiji spoke deprecating anarchism and violence. When he referred to the action of the authorities in taking the most extraordinary precautions to protect the Viceroy in Benares, Besant interrupted him and raised a point of order. She then whispered something to the Princes on the platform and left the hall along with them. But later she gave a contradictory version that her interruption was intended to protect Gandhiji from the CID officer who whispered to her of his noting every word that Gandhiji uttered for onward transmission to the authorities. Disputing her version, Gandhiji submitted the following defence: "... If it was for my protection why was it necessary for her to rise with the Princes and to leave the hall as I hold she did along with them? ... I was certainly not guilty of any incitement to violence ... In order that the fullest justice might be done both to Mrs. Besant and myself I would make the following suggestion: She says that she does not propose to defend

\* After the Surat Session, the Nationalists were dubbed as Extremists.



herself by quoting the sentence which drove the Princes away as that would be playing into the enemy's hands; according to her previous statement my speech is already in the hands of the detectives so that so far as my safety is concerned her forbearance is not going to be of the slightest use. Would it not therefore be better that she should either publish a verbatim report if she has it or reproduce such sentiments in my speech as in her opinion necessitated her interruption and the Princes' withdrawal?"<sup>4</sup>

Gandhiji concluded his aforesaid letter to *The Hindu*, as follows: "But for Mrs. Besant's interruption, I would have concluded my speech within a few minutes and no possible misconception about my views on anarchism would have arisen."<sup>5</sup>

Some prominent Nationalists of the Madras Presidency, who were quick to discern in Besant a new attitude after her release from internment, were unhappy about her having been elected the President of the Indian National Congress. Her speeches in general and the two resolutions she moved at the conference of the All India Congress Committee and the All India Muslim League in particular, provoked their wrath. While asking for the release of the Ali brothers, Besant said that the Mohammadans would not be satisfied unless they were released. This was construed to be a deliberate act on her part to create a rift between the Hindus and the Musalmans when the former were also equally anxious to secure the release of the two Muslim compatriots.<sup>6</sup>

Her resolution soliciting the Government to appoint a Parliamentary Committee to enquire into the working of the Press Law in the country with a view to delaying their repeal shocked all who had not forgotten her earlier speeches and writings urging the immediate repeal of those very Acts which did immense mischief.<sup>7</sup>

In respect of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms Scheme, the first instinct of the Home Rule League under her lead was to reject the reforms *in toto*. The *New India* unequivocally condemned the Reforms Report as a "bitter insult" to India. But later she accepted the Reforms Bill and said in justification thereof that the Joint Select Committee had changed it beyond recognition! She had two "satisfactory" talks with Montagu in London in May-June 1919 whereat it was agreed that Education and Industries would be handed over to the *transferred* half.<sup>8</sup>

### *Beginnings of Besant's Eclipse:*

The major political developments in the Presidency of Madras

commencing from the Conjeevaram Provincial Conference in 1918 also hastened the exit of Besant from the arena of active politics. It was the twenty-fourth session of the Madras Provincial Conference presided over by Sarojini Naidu. It was a landmark in the annals of the nationalist politics in South India. It marked the beginning of the decline of Besant's immense political influence. Besant moved a resolution at this conference soliciting India's unconditional help to Britain in her war efforts. She held out the hope that the British would reciprocate this gesture through constitutional reforms. Clause (B) of Besant's resolutions which stirred up sharp controversies ran as follows: "That this conference having read and carefully considered the statement of the Viceroy that Indians are required to defend the soil of the motherland against invasion and that the man-power of India is also needed in defence of the Empire within which India is seeking to obtain Home Rule, resolves that, under the circumstances of imminent peril of invasion in which the country is slated to stand and of the necessity which exists for increased aid from India in the maintenance of the Empire, it calls upon all patriotic organisations to aid in recruiting for Home and Imperial defence, especially to enroll young men of the middle classes to form under Indian officers a citizen army sufficiently large to defend the country from invasion. But the Conference desires to point out that some of the present methods of recruitment are oppressive and highly unsatisfactory, in which no self-respecting Indian would take part".<sup>9</sup>

This "man-power" Clause was vigorously challenged by young Satyamurti\* who moved an amendment recommending its deletion. Lambasting Besant on her motion, Satyamurti stated emphatically that India's response to the Premier's message depended on England's response to her appeal for bringing about the speedy regeneration of India. He also contended that the Conference did not have any mandate from the country for passing the motion.<sup>10</sup>

Satyamurti's amendment was not acceptable to Besant and a day and a half passed off with both sides refusing to yield ground.\*\*

\*Outstanding orator and Parliamentarian; Swarajist; played a significant role in the politics of the Presidency until his death in 1943.

\*\* The debate on the resolution became acrimonious. Eventually the matter was adjourned to the next day doubtless with the view of persuading Satyamurti in the meanwhile to revise his stand. But Satyamurti remained equally stubborn and he had the "very influential support of Mr. Kasturi Ranga Iyengar". (*The Madras Mail* 13.5.1918).



In the end, after all the halla ballo that took place, Besant, to the stupefaction of the gathering abandoned her resolution altogether! And Satyamurti, not to be outdone by her, announced his whole-hearted acceptance of her entire resolution which was then carried!!<sup>11</sup>

Notwithstanding this unexpected drama of unanimity, the aftermath of the Conjeevaram Conference was felt keenly in the deliberations of the Madras Provincial Congress Committee. Besant and her group could feel the slackening of their hold over the Congress. In order to set things right, they began a recruiting campaign to increase their voting strength. By way of countering her campaign of recruitment, Kasturiranga Iyengar and his associates launched their own recruiting programme with equal vigour and drive.

The happenings at the Conjeevaram Conference made even the Moderates wonder how long would Besant be able to hold her own! V.S. Srinivasa Sastri who felt that Besant's stature in the political world was declining, wrote: “. . . the old lady had best shut up her political show as having in a way achieved its purpose after Montagu's announcement of his proposals and retreat with flying colours into her theosophical shell. Will somebody put it to her Mahatmas?”<sup>12</sup> Sastri's anxiety was well-founded as Besant's acts were becoming more and more erratic. There was a general disquiet that she as the President of the National Congress in alliance with an enthusiastic band of followers in the Home Rule League was disparaging the work, policy and outlook of the “yesterdays” of the Congress party. Her dual role of “running with the Congress hare and hunting with the Home Rule hound” was strongly objected as that created a show of “hankering after a unity which one had done everything in one's power to destroy.”<sup>13</sup>

Within three months of the Conjeevaram Conference there was another trial of strength between the Besantines and their opponents. It was a sequel to the cable from the London Committee\* recommending that the Reforms Scheme should be accepted. This brought a complete change in Besant's original stand on the Reforms. The response of prominent publicists of Bombay, Calcutta

\* The British Congress Committee which was maintained chiefly by the Indian National Congress. In the days of William Wedderburn, the National Congress used to vote sums ranging from Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 50,000 annually for its expenses. (Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. 1, p. 79)

and elsewhere to this cable was in favour of taking a decision tantamount to acceptance of the Reforms scheme. This decision put the Home Rule League in a quandary. Ultimately, Besant as the President of the National Congress, decided that it would be expedient to "accept the Reforms but not without modifications". This decision was not at variance with that of the Moderates who also accepted the Reforms "subject to modifications". It was thus clear that Besant and the Moderates would have still accepted the Reform package as it was, in the hypothetical event of the British Parliament refusing to accept any modifications therein. This presumption was further strengthened by Besant's agreement with Polak that the rejection of the Reforms Scheme by India would be perilous!<sup>14</sup>

Besant had a special Conference convened at the Gokhale Hall on 3 August 1918 with C. Vijayaraghavachari in the Chair for discussing the reforms. There was a heated controversy over the acceptance of the Reforms Scheme in which Besant joined issue with Satyamurti and his group. There were two sets of resolutions on the Reforms Scheme—one drafted by the organisers of the Conference, including Besant and C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, recommending a number of modifications in the Scheme with a view to making it more acceptable to the Indians; and the other by Satyamurti and his group which condemned the Reforms proposals wholesale. During the discussions within the Subjects Committee which was dominated by the Besantines, Satyamurti argued in favour of rejecting the Scheme. The Chairman of the conference also appeared to subscribe to this stand. But C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer and B.P. Wadia stood their ground, "doubtless at the instance of Mrs. Besant" and managed to get their resolution accepting the Reforms passed. But when a large portion of the delegates insisted on the total rejection of the Scheme, there was a pandemonium and the Home Rule leaders had to retire to an inner room for the drafting of the resolution, shutting out the audience from witnessing what became an orgy of unrestrained violence.<sup>15</sup> The scene of this uproar "bore a strong resemblance to the historic Donny Book Fair".<sup>16</sup> As a sequel, Besant announced her intention of resigning from the Presidency of the Home Rule League. Evidently she had sensed that the feeling against her was mounting.

Her whole-hearted approval of the Reforms Bill which had been already discussed was a foregone conclusion.

It was about this time that Besant ran into rough weather with



P. Varadarajulu Naidu, the lynchpin of the Madras Presidency Association. As Secretary of this Association Naidu had done a good deal of active work and effective service in maintaining the harmony between the Brahman and non-Brahman castes in the teeth of the Non-Brahman movement. Wherever he went Varadarajulu Naidu practically wiped out the schism. An anti-Home Ruler to start with, Naidu was converted into a Home Ruler by the interment of Besant. As a devoted member of the Home Rule League he did much constructive work as a touring lecturer within a short time. However, when the Home Rule League sent him an order appointing him as a worker on pay, he declined the offer and returned the order. He quit the Home Rule League on the establishment of the Madras Presidency Association and became its first Secretary.<sup>17</sup>

When Besant began to play up to her countrymen as was evidenced by the happenings at Conjeevaram, Naidu regarded her with disfavour. He turned not merely her severest critic but violently anti-Besant. His speeches were highly critical of Besant and her trusted "henchmen". An irate Besant retaliated by a most vitriolic attack on him. She wrote in the *New India* about *Agent Provocateurs* wherein she charged Naidu with incendiarism.<sup>18</sup> In this signed article she "handed over Naidu" as a man who had just completed a tour of criminal speeches in Tiruppur and other places inciting people to violence but fleeing the consequences thereof. It was written at a time when the Government was only too ready to turn its engines of repression against all those it considered to be ranged against its reactionary policies. This was treated as "a clear harbinger and in part a basis of encouragement"<sup>19</sup> for orders from Government to either gag Naidu or take other repressive measures against him. Besant stoutly denied that there was any such intention behind her article. Commenting on this article, Rajaji wrote that such a charge against Naidu by one holding positions in the Congress and in the Home Rule League as Besant did, "deserved immediate and universal condemnation".<sup>20</sup>

Besant's article further embittered the feelings of Naidu who stooped to personal attacks not only on Besant and C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer but also on Sarojini Naidu pointing that she was too inexperienced to be the President of a political Conference.<sup>21</sup> In the meantime some prominent men of the Presidency including Besant appealed to P. Kesava Pillai to check Naidu's "extremely improper and suicidal" activities. In fact Besant was much dis-

tressed over Pillai's failure to put an end to the vile attacks on Home Rulers indulged in by the Secretary of his Madras Presidency Association. She accused him of playing the "Government Game" by dividing the party.<sup>22</sup> The printed accusations of Naidu led to large scale meetings organised by Naidu's supporters in the chief towns of the Presidency where Besant was slandered and censured, none standing up to defend her. Much dejected, she wrote that Naidu was "certainly doing the Government work . . . even more effectively than Welby has been doing it and he has done infinitely more harm to the national cause . . . for Welby is an open enemy, Varadarajulu, a secret one."<sup>23</sup>

Kesava Pillai's intervention to check Naidu only strained their own relations as the latter refused to budge. He would stand by what he wrote about Besant and C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer. He made no secret of his contempt for "a lady who has no patriotism for her own country but professes patriotism for a foreign country like India".<sup>24</sup> He did not expect any defence from the Madras Presidency Association which he remarked had lost all self-respect and dignity when it accepted money from Besant for the *Indian Patriot*\* and the Indian politicians had lost their self-respect by associating themselves with Besant. The result of the whole episode was that Naidu was asked by Pillai to quietly resign his Secretaryship of the Madras Presidency Association.<sup>25</sup> When the office bearers of the Association issued a Manifesto against Naidu in July 1918 it had the most adverse effect of the dissolution of three of its branch associations. Naidu however continued in the Association.\*\*

Naidu was also a bit too harsh to Besant. There is of course no gainsaying her shortcomings which were perhaps engendered by her senility. Withal Besant had many virtues. Her devotion to India which she adopted as her own motherland was genuine. She did become an integral part of the national scene. Her dedication and sacrifice for the liberation of the country of her adoption could never be called into question.

\* An organ of the Madras Presidency Association which had a most trying time at this juncture. "The wealthy members of the MPA did not spend a pie for making it an effective organ of opinion and to-day, with a circulation of 200, that paper is dragging on a miserable and useless existence," wrote C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer (His letter to Kesava Pillai, 4 Nov. 1918, *Kesava Pillai papers*).

\*\*But he could not devote much attention to its activities on account of his involvement in the Madura Mills strike and the consequent incarceration he suffered.



*Support to Rowlatt : the climax of perversion :*

And then came her support for the Rowlatt Act, the opposition to which was universal among Indians. When the Bill was being discussed in the Imperial Legislative Council, a meeting of the Executive Committee of the All India Congress Committee was held at Madras. Besant and her lieutenants who attended the meeting assumed a “turbulent” attitude and refrained from offering any suggestions when the new legislation was discussed.<sup>26</sup> C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer declined the offer to serve on the Committee to collect funds for the Congress deputation to England because his group was opposed to the Delhi Congress resolution\* and so would not be a party to collect funds to promote them.

In Besant’s view the Rowlatt Act was vastly changed from the recommendations of the Report of the Sedition Committee and contained nothing that a good citizen could object to! Only a few months earlier, her own paper flashed out headlines on the Rowlatt Bill as having retained “the same sable hue” as the Report.<sup>27</sup> This was the height of inconsistency which baffled many—because the political situation remained the same as it was when the Sedition Committee Report was submitted. Nothing had occurred in India or in the Presidency of Madras to suggest that violence had assumed such an enormity as to pose an imminent threat to the stability of the land and warrant the passing of the Act. It was therefore impossible for those who knew Besant to reconcile her earlier attitude with her new mood which, to say the least, was perilous. She made the most shocking statement when she said: “When the mob begins to pelt them (soldiers) with brickbats, it is more merciful to order the soldiers to fire a few volleys of buckshot”.<sup>28</sup> Her vigorous statements on the Rowlatt Bill turned even the students of Madras against her.

The only possible explanation for this abrupt decision to support such a despicable legislation as the Rowlatt Act on the part of Besant could be the mental agony caused at that age by the desertion of many of her erstwhile Indian companions. She was two and seventy and her stock had slumped down. Yet she insisted on remaining in the field, carping at those who refused to toe her line completely. This cost her much in reputation. When the strength

\* The resolution adopted at this Congress held in December 1918, condemned the Montford Reforms as “inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing”.

of her defenders dwindled considerably Besant should have gracefully withdrawn from the field. But she did not do so. Instead she was burning with the desire to remain in the forefront.

In February 1919 Besant came into violent conflict with the Editor of *The Hindu* when she launched an attack upon the Madras audience averring that the public life in the Presidency had deteriorated. It was obviously a reference to the meeting at Gokhale Hall addressed by B.C. Pal who had consistently been slandering Besant both on the platform and in the press. But the real reason for such an explosion of anger lay in Kasturiranga Iyengar's having chaired the meeting. Besant became so unrestrained in her accusations against Kasturiranga Iyengar as to assert that it was the policy of *The Hindu* "to insert all insults except against its own favourites and the matter has come to a head with Mr. B.C. Pal" and that the paper had been "sedulously fostering divisions ruinous to the country".<sup>29</sup> She became silent when the paper stated that it preferred the "cool judgment" of the public to the "emanations" from her "heated brain".<sup>30</sup>

One who defended the Rowlatt Act could not be expected to approve of the agitation against it. She sneered at both the satyagraha movement and the satyagrahis whose only misfortune was their not being led by Besant.<sup>31</sup> Her right as an individual to doubt the expediency of launching a new method of agitation at a crucial moment was not questioned. Her opposition to satyagraha for fear of probable disorders was justified as there were disorders in some parts of the country. But when her prediction that the movement itself would misfire proved false, she had no hesitation in using her slings against Gandhiji. She held Gandhiji responsible for the shooting incident at Delhi during the "Protest against Rowlatt Act" on 30 March 1919 and the resultant loss of life.\* What was worse, she expected others to share this "simplistic logic". Passive resistance which was justified by her when used to protest against her translation to a hill station was condemned as criminal by her when used against the Black Act. One must neces-

\* There was a misunderstanding about the proposed date of the *hartal* which was first fixed for 30 March and then postponed to 6 April. The communication regarding postponement not having reached it, Delhi observed *hartal* on 30 March. When the satyagrahis who had assembled at the Delhi Railway Station declined to disperse at the order of the Magistrate, the police opened fire at them. It was a "slaughter of innocents" at Delhi. (Gandhiji's telegram to Malaviya, 3 April 1919, *CWMG*, Vol. XV, p. 174).



sarily recall here her furious editorials in the *New India* against the policy enunciated by Pentland in 1917 to deliberately stifle constitutional agitation and compare them with such diametrically opposite views as—"brickbats had inevitably to be answered by bullets".<sup>32</sup> Her apotheosis of the brickbats and bullets theme would be of interest. To quote her own words: "The Act like 'Dora' puts everyone's liberty at the mercy of the Executive, but it does not, like 'Dora' affect the whole country . . . . at once it can only come into force in limited areas, where revolutionary and anarchical movements and crimes are prevalent and I hold that while India is in peril of revolution and invasion no good citizens can object to the Government being armed with the powers given".<sup>33</sup> She even exhorted "all good citizens" to rally round the King's Government until the danger of war was over. Besant had conveniently ignored here the fact that in 1917 too when the Madras Government harassed and interned her, the country was in the throes of the war and that the crisis of a great war did not stop her from denouncing the Defence of India Act.

Deprecating such "dishonest" line of argument in its leader *The Hindu* concluded: "But Mrs. Besant is a law unto herself and what she has said, she has said until she says something else".<sup>34</sup> *The Hindu* was absolutely correct. Besant's somersault was staggering. Records of her private meetings with some of the moderate leaders bring this trait of her character to the fore. While the Rowlatt Bill was on the anvil Besant advocated a strong agitation against it—stronger than mere disobedience of particular laws!<sup>35</sup> She favoured a revolution, but agreed with Gandhiji that the youth of India could be kept away from anarchy and violence only by methods of passive resistance. But she was also wooing the Moderates and was instigating them to organise a total revolution which would cut at the very roots of a civil Government. Her real motive was perhaps not to undermine the youngmen's respect for law. She met V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and a few other moderate leaders repeatedly to get them sign her proposed pledge for such a radical revolution. But the Moderates were unanimous in their apprehension that her alliance would prove embarrassing. Their indifference certainly hurt her *amour propre*. Her grief was all the more poignant when the Liberal League, an association of the Moderates, admitted into its fold C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer but not her. In the words of Srinivasa Sastri: "It was impossible to console her. . . . She accused, threatened and implored us by turns. . . . I have never seen a great person

in such a paroxysm of chagrin and grief".<sup>36</sup>

Besant turned against Tilak also and questioned the propriety of Jamnadas and other Home Rule League officials collecting contributions for the Tilak Memorial Fund.<sup>37</sup> In her changed perception there was a grave political danger in identifying the national cause with Tilak. By way of justifying her attack on Tilak whose cause she had espoused with great vigour earlier, she pointed out that he encouraged violent methods. She also averred that she had extended her co-operation to him only on his promise that he would mend his ways but that this promise was short lived. A disgraceful memoir on Tilak was published in the *London Times*, widely-known as the British mouthpiece of Besant.<sup>38</sup> She once bracketed Tilak with Kasturiranga Iyengar and called them both a "real menace to India". Kasturiranga Iyengar was gratified by this statement which though meant in a deprecatory sense did him honour by coupling him with Tilak.<sup>39</sup>

Towards the end of 1919 Besant was staying in Southampton. But she sailed all the way to India to attend the Amritsar Congress in order to urge acceptance of Montford Reforms proposals.<sup>40</sup> Unlike the previous sessions the proceedings of this Congress were not in English but in Hindi. Consequently, most of the non-Hindi delegates could not follow them. Besant took this opportunity to dub the National Congress, a "Provincial Congress". This Congress decided to give the lead in accepting the Reform Act\*; at the same time it resolved to keep up an agitation for its continuous improvement. This decision to "ask for more" was not acceptable to Besant: she accused the Congress of ingratitude to Montagu the main author of the Reforms proposals. She said that as long as the Indians were part of the Commonwealth of the Empire they must co-operate with the Britons. "... Some of you may not care to hear me now, even though you know how I have worked for you here and in England ... it will be a shame if you do not thank them (Montagu and Lord Sinha) for the work they have done for you".<sup>41</sup>

According to Besant, the Congress had outlived its utility since the days when with one voice it demanded the revocation of her internment order. India, she said, was a grateful nation but not the Congress. The disloyal Congress, she pronounced, did not therefore represent India. Some of her abuses on the Congress were couched in such offensive language that it would be a "revelation to a Billing-

\**Infra* Chapter Eight.



sgate fish-wife".<sup>42</sup> Little wonder these accusations were treated as a succession of epileptic fits by even her close friends.

As she apprehended, very soon the Home Rule League also slipped away from her fingers. It rejected her Presidentship in favour of Mahatma Gandhi who was elected President on 28 April 1920. Gandhiji reorganised the League under the name of *Swaraj Sabha* and intended to work through it if the Congress refused to accept his policy and programme of non-co-operation.<sup>43</sup> Thus the very people "who in 1917 shouted for her now yelled at her, tried to gag her in the Indian National Congress and on public platforms and tried to hound her out of the field of politics. She was howled down and even hooted and hissed".<sup>44</sup> But Besant was not a whit disheartened by these. If she was, she did not show it.

In mid 1920 Besant planned a movement to bring together Indians and Europeans of approximately similar views about the Reforms in particular for purposes of discussion and occasional action. She met Srinivasa Sastri, Paranjpye and others. But they were extremely reluctant to get identified with her although they knew that a direct negative would break her heart and deprive them of the great help she was giving through *New India* and the numerous adherents she had all over the Presidency. Srinivasa Sastri confessed that it would be "both ungrateful and cowardly on our part to shrink from association with one who is so useful but we are in a mortal funk about her taking something into her head all of a sudden and landing us in a tight corner".<sup>45</sup>

Within three years of her unanimous election as President of the prestigious Indian National Congress Besant stood alone with merely five of her lieutenants against thousands who favoured Gandhiji's plan of non-co-operation at the Nagpur Session of the Congress in December 1920. By the time the Non-Co-operation Movement was launched, Besant had turned thoroughly pro-British. Suffice it to reproduce the following notification in the *Adyar Bulletin* of 10 January 1921: "His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught arrived here (Madras) to-day—10 January—and had a very fine reception. . . . Desperate efforts were made by the non-co-operators to spoil the proceedings, but they were a ludicrous failure". At the time of the visit of the Prince of Wales in January 1922, there was a wild orgy of arrests and punishments, the prosecutors playing the judge on their victims. Illegalities were committed with trials taking place *in camera*, within the precincts of a jail or of a police station. Many non-co-operators were spirited

away by the police and for weeks their families had not been able to find out their whereabouts. Besant made desperate effort at this crucial hour with her large following of "Theosophical Sheep" to get a resolution passed wholeheartedly praising the Governmental policy of repression and coercion.<sup>46</sup>

While the rest of the country was thus plunged into the Non-Co-operation Movement, Besant was engaged in preparing for the next stage in India's political advancement. The new idea she sponsored was self-determination. She deemed that to be meaningful, self-government had to be conceived by Indians in conformity with India's political genius; and there was to be a constitution modelled on her indigenous institutions. It is imperative in this context to say a word about the Madras Parliament founded by Besant in 1919 to accustom political workers to parliamentary work. The deliberations of this Parliament which met periodically at Gokhale Hall in Madras were published at *Memoranda*. For about two years from 1922, in the course of the work of the Parliament, Besant framed a constitution for India in consultation with her associates. The constitution had also certain features borrowed from the draft constitutions put forward by the several colonies in the British Empire during their struggle for political freedom. This *Swaraj* constitution was put forward at a meeting of a National Convention of all parties in India at Delhi. It was attended amongst others by such Moderate stalwarts as Sapru, Srinivasa Sastri and P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer. This convention was looked upon as the precursor of the Constituent Assembly as its function was to draft a constitution for India without outside interference. But it was not a representative body as it lacked the support of the Congress. It produced in 1925 the Commonwealth of India Bill which went to the House of Commons as George Lansbury's Bill—a private member's resolution—as it did not receive official recognition from the Labour Government of Ramsay MacDonald. The Bill obtained only its first hearing in Parliament and could go no further. Besant had launched the project at the most inopportune moment both in her political career and national history. However, the constitution she drafted was a pioneering one. Her idea of applying self-determination to India did bear fruit when eminent Congress leaders like S. Srinivasa Iyengar and C. Vijayaraghavachari produced their own schemes explicitly acknowledging their indebtedness to her. The Nehru Report that was produced in 1928 by the Committee appointed by the All Parties' Conference that



met later under Motilal's leadership was also modelled on her National Convention. Besant played a good part in the completion of the Nehru Report. And this may be said to have marked the end of her political activities.\*<sup>47</sup>

The crux of the whole issue in the immediate context is that Besant changed her stand on the Montford Reforms proposals which she as President of the Congress had opposed. She engineered an embarrassing defection of the Moderates from the Congress. These erstwhile Moderates who called themselves “Liberals” and formed their own federation subscribed to the Reforms proposals in principle and co-operated with the Government in its implementation. The Congress consistently opposed the Reforms with all its might and main. The vicissitudes of the Reforms proposals *vis-a-vis* the Indian National Movement constitute the subject of the ensuing the chapters.

\* From 1931 she lived in retirement at Adyar (Madras) where she died on 20 September 1933 and was cremated on the seashore.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

# Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms: The Proposals

### *Madras Presidency on the eve of the Reforms:*

The last quarter of 1916 was a momentous period for British India for two reasons. One was the formulation of the "Nineteen Memorandum" and the other the Congress-League Scheme. The first one was a memorandum of thirteen recommendations\* which was submitted to the Viceroy in October 1916 by nineteen elected non-official members of the Imperial Legislative Council of India including V.S. Srinivasa Sastri. The second one was a scheme prepared by the two major national bodies—the Congress and the All-India Muslim League—wherein was crystallised the country's demand. The thirteen recommendations formed the main planks of this Scheme which emerged out of the Lucknow session of the Congress in December 1916. Among other things, the Scheme

\* (1) Half the membership of the Executive Councils should be Indian; European elements should be nominated from the ranks of men trained and educated in the public life of India; (2) Legislative Councils should have a substantial majority of elected members; (3) the strength of the Supreme Council should not be less than 150 and of Provincial Councils not less than 100; (4) budget should be passed in the shape of money bill; India should have fiscal autonomy; (5) Imperial Legislative Council should have power to legislate on all matters and to discuss and pass resolutions relating to all matters of Indian administration and provincial councils should have similar powers in provincial administration; (6) Council of the Secretary of State for India should be abolished; (7) in any scheme of Imperial Federation, India should have the same status as any other self-governing dominion through her chosen representatives; (8) provincial governments should be made autonomous as per Government of India's Despatch of 29 August 1911; (9) major provinces should have a Governor brought from the United Kingdom and an executive council; (10) a full measure of local self-government should be immediately granted; (11) right to carry arms should be granted to the Indians on the same conditions as to Europeans; (12) Indians should be allowed to enlist themselves as volunteers; units of a territorial army should be established in India; and (13) Commissions in the Indian Army should be given to Indian youths under conditions similar to those applicable to Europeans.



provided for provincial autonomy. It exposed the inadequacy of the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909 and claimed India's right to Parliamentary institutions. All the same it did not fail to recognise the limitations of India's capacity for full self-government. The Scheme stood more for the dilution of bureaucracy than for the establishment of undiluted popular institutions. It was more in the nature of a compromise between good government by bureaucracy and self-government by people. On all matters of internal administration, the Scheme made the irremovable executive responsible to an elected majority in the Council. It sought for the latter the power of the purse which made Montagu remark that "it is practically responsible Government at one full swoop".<sup>1</sup> The Scheme also made a claim to the immediate grant to Indians of 50 per cent of the higher posts in the Civil Service. In a lighter vein the members called it "Luck-now" session as it embodied all the elements of a "united National Assembly". Such an assembly was a sequel to the fraternising of the Hindus and the Muslims as well as the coming together of the Nationalists and the Moderates on a common platform to end their existing political status and to secure for their common motherland the position of a free and equal partner in the comity of nations.

This Hindu-Muslim *rapprochement*, known as the Lucknow Pact, recognised the principle of communal electorate so far as the Muslims were concerned. Jinnah hailed it as the birth of a United Indian Nation. Certainly the Lucknow session constituted a landmark not only in the annals of the Indian National Congress but also in that of the British Indian politics. The opponents of the Congress had to swallow the bitter truth that this much maligned organization had "outlived ridicule and opposition from without and intolerance and disruptive tendency within".<sup>2</sup>

Hardinge, the Viceroy of India (1911-1916) reiterated unto the last moment of his tenure the need for a change in the political constitution of British India towards greater participation of the Indians in running the administration.<sup>3</sup> It was a great pity that a Viceroy like Hardinge who indentified himself with the people of India, and who "trusted" them, "believed" in them, "hoped", "feared", "wept" and "rejoiced" with them, had to lay down the reins of viceroyalty at a most critical time in the country's history.<sup>4</sup> Even those Englishmen who were no friends of India were fain to admit that India's sacrifices during the war had made it more imperative for Britain than ever before to look at the problems of

Indian administration from a new perspective. Valentine Chirol,\* a great admirer of the great achievements of the *Raj* in India, confessed that unless the British made a prompt declaration in favour of the right to self-government “the internment of half-a-dozen Mrs. Besants can do very little good”.<sup>5</sup> Even so the British authorities could not see in India the material for genuine representative institutions except on a very circumscribed scale.<sup>6</sup>

India experienced her first disappointment when her fond hope of a substantial gain with the assumption of office by the new Ministry in Britain was blighted. When Lloyd George succeeded Asquith as Prime Minister in December 1916, the event was characterised in Britain as the “most dramatic incident of modern political history”. But it made very little difference to India, since Austen Chamberlain, who hardly ever bothered to obtain a knowledge and grasp of Indian affairs, continued to be the Secretary of State for India. The Secretary of State was virtually the ruler of India in the name of the Crown. Surprisingly Britain showed little discrimination in the choice of the man who held the lofty position of ruling over 315 millions of Indians. Invariably the person selected for this post was not one who was considered to be capable of delivering the goods expected of him but one who could not be accommodated anywhere else.

If the overall situation was bad in British India during the years of the War, it was worse in the Presidency of Madras. The Presidency was the “storm centre” of Indian politics in 1916. Its leaders demanded for India a place in the Empire “equal to her deserts, giving full and generous recognition of every advance in the art of self-government that her people can achieve”.<sup>7</sup> They also urged the authorities to recognise the need for the representation of India on the Imperial Conference by two Indians, one of whom should be a non-official. The “red hot agitation” for Home Rule which Annie Besant started in the Presidency a couple of years earlier, was formally launched in 1916, with the founding of the

\* Sir Ignatius Valentine Chirol (1852-1929) author, journalist and traveller served on *The Times* till 1912; visited India seventeen times during a period of six to seven years. Three of his most widely read books were: *Indian Unrest* (1910), *India—Old and New* (1921) and *India* (“The Modern World” Series, 1926). The *Indian Unrest* involved Chirol in a libel action in the English High Court brought by Tilak to whom he attributed in that book a large moral responsibility for outbreaks of violence and murders in India. The Court’s verdict went in favour of Chirol.



Home Rule League".\* It was in this Presidency that the opponents of the Home Rule Movement organised themselves into a counter-movement.\*\* Though the Non-Brahman Movement lasted less than two decades, the abiding loyalty of its proponents to the British *Raj* constitutes a critical chapter in the history of British India.

Pentland, who was "Madras's greatest disappointment",<sup>8</sup> stayed as Governor for a much longer tenure than was customary. When he assumed the gubernatorial position on 30 October 1912, it was widely expected that this sturdy liberal, by virtue of his close association with Campbell-Bannermann, would uphold democratic principles. His appointment was greeted with approval by English as well as Indian journals. His reply to the addresses of welcome from the public bodies of the Presidency strengthened the expectations. He expressed a keen desire to understand the aspirations of the people of the Presidency and to contribute as much as he could to their progress and welfare. He promised to consider with sympathy whatever petitions might be placed before him. But his achievements as Governor of Madras in the following six years and five months justified neither the high credentials with which he came nor the expectations he aroused. The very practice of granting extension for so long a period for the Governor was not in the public interest. But public opinion counted for nothing in determining the policy of the colonial government.<sup>9</sup>

As President of the Legislative Council, Pentland had extensive powers vested in him in regard to disallowance and admission of interpellations and resolutions, regulation of business before the Council, and interpretation of rules. A benevolent Governor would have used such massive authority to widen the powers of the non-official members in the Council and to interpret the rules liberally. But Pentland chose to use them differently. The result was destructive: the members were deprived of their legitimate right to ventilate the grievances of the people they represented. It is imperative to review certain questionable features of his reign which exposed him to odium.

The picture of the Legislative Council as it functioned under the Minto-Morley Act during Pentland's Governorship as drawn by the columnist, "Flaneur" of *The Hindu* would make amusing reading:

\* Supra Chapter Three.

\*\* Supra Chapter Two.

“From the Visitors’ Gallery the scene below looked very business-like. The horse-shoe shaped arrangements of blackwood seats facing the line (at the horse shoe’s open end) in the centre of which His Excellency the President’s seat placed with two long tables and bench chairs on both sides look trim and compact. In the centre of the horse-shoe are two parallel benches and tables for press representatives and, however bad the acoustic properties of the Council Chamber may be, every word must necessarily be heard distinctly by the reporters. To me sitting up aloft and not being able to follow very closely the whole of the proceedings, they appeared to be mechanical and lifeless. One could hear a ceaseless monotonous flow of words. The language of caustic comment and indignant condemnation, of humble appeal and fervid declamation was all delivered in one even monotone. There was no emphatic gesture, no indication of excitement, no passion in delivery, no simulated anger. I noticed that the majority of the European members of the Council were rather lacking in the hirsute properties of the head. This indicated one of two things: that either men intellectually well endowed had by force of merit and ability found their way into the Council or that the burden of the Council is too much for them and is depriving them of a natural adornment. But inasmuch as the term of a Councillor is very limited, it would seem that the first reason given is the right one”.<sup>10</sup>

His power of nomination was used by Pentland not unoften to bring in persons who did nothing except standing faithfully by the Government during voting time to defeat the non-official motions. His power to disallow motions on the ground that they should be moved in the Imperial Legislature was exercised to prevent the consideration of even important questions concerning the welfare of the people of the Presidency as in the case of the land-revenue assessment. His discretion to disallow resolutions which in his opinion were opposed to public interests was misused to preclude discussions on matters on which public feeling was intense and demanded immediate ventilation. The exodus to Nilgiri Hills for six months every year to administer the Presidency therefrom at a huge cost was a case in point. The propriety of this procedure, particularly at a time of retrenchment and economy drive on a large scale, was exercising the public mind. They were justifiably anxious that the Government should spend as much time as possible in the centre of public activities. On the first occasion when the resolution appeared on the agenda, the mover was influenced into



withdrawing it. On subsequent occasions, Pentland arbitrarily shut out any deliberations on the subject which in his opinion would jeopardize public interests. When this was brought to the notice of Montagu, the Secretary of State for India (who was then in Delhi) he remarked, "How can one expect the Minto-Morley Reforms to work well in this sort of way? It shows how necessary instructions to Governors are".<sup>11</sup> It was contended in Government circles that more work was turned out on the hills than on the plains!

Between 1913 and 1917 as many as 150 resolutions were disallowed by Pentland on one flimsy ground or another. This was over and above the motions disallowed owing to members' default.<sup>12</sup> As regards questions, they were either so badly mutilated as to appear ludicrous; or they were answered non-chalantly. The rules of Pentland's Government for asking questions were as follows: "No question can be asked unless it complies with the following conditions, namely (a) it shall be so framed as to be merely a request for information; (b) it shall not be of excessive length; (c) it shall not contain arguments, inferences, cronical expressions, or defamatory statements, nor shall it refer to the conduct or character of persons except in official or public capacity; (d) it shall not ask for an expression or an opinion or the solution of a hypothetical proposition". In spite of these instructions, questions were asked frequently in the Council much to Pentland's annoyance in such forms as "Has the attention of the Government been drawn?", "Have the Government seen a certain statement in a newspaper and what action they propose to take?" etc. etc. Pentland therefore excluded these questions by citing a rule which he copied from the House of Commons Manual:

If a question a member is asking contains a statement he must make himself responsible for the accuracy of the statement.

Even this did not satisfy Pentland who sought the advice of Ilbert\* as to whether this was sufficient or were there in operation any additional restrictions to which regard should be paid in the attempt to frame any such rule.<sup>13</sup> Results of many enquiries were not published although public interest demanded it. The real object of the right of moving resolutions conferred on non-official members who formed the majority in the Council by the Act of 1909 was not

\* Law Member of Viceroy Ripon's Council.

realised in the Presidency. In other words, *the absence of an elected President for the Legislative Council was nowhere felt so keenly as in the Presidency of Madras*. This should be ascribed to an unconscious bias entertained by the President of the Council who was also the Head of the Executive Government. The fear that non-official resolutions might be votes of censure on his Government had obviously impelled Pentland to intrude upon private members' rights and give erroneous and illegal rulings.\* Though instances of his wrong rulings can be cited galore, an instance or two deserve special mention. When B.V. Narasimha Iyer, Member of the Legislative Council began his address on the Madras City Municipal Bill in Tamil, he was pulled up by the Governor and was asked to speak in English. The member would not comply with as the rule did not forbid him to speak in Tamil. After a good deal of arguments and interjections from many members in the Assembly,

\* The following table, showing the adoption of only 10.05 per cent of the resolutions on matters of general public interest and about 3 per cent of those on financial statement would bear eloquent testimony to the treatment accorded to resolutions by the Madras Government.

*Matter of Public Interest*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Adopted</i>	<i>Lost</i>	<i>Withdrawn</i>	<i>Total</i>
1913	5	14	36	55
1914	7	22	42	71
1915	8	28	49	85
1916	17	18	51	86
1917	16	24	88	128
1918	9	28	82	119
1919	Nil	4	39	43
	<hr/> 62	<hr/> 138	<hr/> 387	<hr/> 587

*Finance*

1913	—	6	27	33
1914	—	7	22	29
1915	—	8	18	26
1916	1	10	14	25
1917	—	5	27	32
1918	4	9	39	52
1919	3	16	42	61
	<hr/> 8	<hr/> 61	<hr/> 189	<hr/> 258



the adamant presiding officer ruled that the member should speak only in English or else would be declared out of order. Narasimha Iyer sat down refusing to speak in any other language than his own mother tongue. *The Hindu* congratulated Iyer "on his pluck in endeavouring to introduce the innovation".<sup>14</sup> Pentland went out of his way to appoint Harold Stuart as Vice President of the Council, overlooking his senior P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer although in certain other provinces Indian members of the Executive Council were so elevated. Even when he was elevated to that status in 1915, Iyer was denied the opportunity to preside over any sitting of the Council.

In April 1917, B. Shiva Rao moved a resolution recommending that the Council should meet oftener than it did. The motion was defeated but it evoked the most provocative speech from Pentland revealing his true nature. The eight points he emphasised on this occasion were: (1) most of the resolutions brought forward had no substance in them; (2) the members had no business to deprive the people of their time; (3) no one had suffered owing to the absence of more meetings; (4) the questions had to be considered from a business point of view; (5) a good deal of business would be done by personal conference out of the Council; (6) every resolution that was brought forward but had no substance in it caused a wastage of public expenditure; (7) the Council was not a debating society; and (8) India might evolve a new form of representative government but, for the present, there was something surely to be learnt from the experience of other countries.<sup>15</sup>

Characterising him as "an early Victorian Governor in post-war India," Montagu describes Madras under Pentland thus: "Here, if anywhere, officials administrate (sic) and do not govern; here if anywhere, they refuse to explain themselves and hold themselves aloof; here, if anywhere, they misuse powers either through their press Act or their power to disallow resolutions and bills. . . . . Pentland does not know what is going on in his own province. How can he know? He never discusses politics with these people".<sup>16</sup>

### *Reaction to public demand:*

At a public meeting held under the presidency of P. Kesava Pillai in March 1917, the following three resolutions were passed: (1) to demand that the Congress-League Scheme was the minimum reform which was urgently needed; (2) to urge the conferment on India of the status of an equal partner of the Empire in any scheme

of federation that might be adopted after the war; and (3) to request the publication of the Government of India despatch to the Secretary of State on the subject of Indian political reforms. These were duly communicated to the Secretary of State and the Viceroy.<sup>17</sup>

Many public meetings were held in Madras in June 1917 inducing the people to take the vow of *Swadeshi* which gave the jitters to the Government of Madras. The streets of Madras were placarded for some days with exhortations to the public to “take the *Swadeshi* Vow”. Speakers at these meetings called upon their audience to take this vow. Their exhortations to the public that one way to obtain Home Rule was to “take the *Swadeshi* vow which reunited Bengal”, unnerved the authorities concerned. The latter were positive that the *raison d’etre* of the agitation was not mainly or even secondarily economic but purely political in nature, it being a deliberate attempt to “revive the political aspect of the moribund *Swadeshi* movement”.<sup>18</sup>

At a joint meeting of the All India Congress Committee and the Council of the Muslim League held in July 1917, it was decided to send a deputation to England and to canvass a scheme for “passive resistance”. In its lengthy representation to the Secretary of State and the Viceroy the meeting also declared that the warning speeches delivered by Pentland in Madras and Michael O’Dwyer in the Punjab and the internment of Besant and her two colleagues had created a situation fraught with anxiety to all who were interested in the orderly progress and advancement of the country.<sup>19</sup> However, passive resistance was not put into operation as the three internees were released following the change that had taken place exactly at this time in the India office—the replacement of Chamberlain by Montagu.

Pentland had no time to listen to political demands. What then was the contribution of a Governor who was so concerned about public time and public expenditure towards alleviating the economic crisis the Presidency was facing? There were food riots in Madras in September 1918 when looters gaily went about looting food shops, vegetable markets, and grocery shops in Kotewal Bazaar, Moore Market, Triplicane, Mylapore and many other areas of the metropolis. It looked as if they were determined to force the hands of Government to adopt protective measures to contain inflation and profiteering. The police failed to stop a few militant factory hands who succeeded in disorganising trade in the city and terrorised shopkeepers for two days. This was especially discreditable as looting



was spoken of as a possibility three to four days earlier.<sup>20</sup> A prompt notification that the Governor would be immediately returning to the city from the hills would have done much to remedy matters.

At a public meeting on 15 September 1918, the citizens of Madras demanded the Government to relieve the people from the pressure of high prices and food scarcity. They urged on the Governor and the Director of Civil Supplies to publish every week in the newspapers a return showing the amount of rolling-stock available for goods traffic and the allotment thereby to the applicants, their names, number of wagons allotted and the goods for which wagons were allowed. This meeting appealed also to the wealthy and philanthropic citizens of Madras and the various social service leagues and Associations to take immediate steps to open depots for the sale of food-stuffs at cost price in various centres of the city.<sup>21</sup>

But Pentland was too busy to look into matters of that sort. He was perched on the Ooty hills oblivious of the disillusionment, discontent and depression on the plains which were the inevitable aftermath of the war. When his attention was drawn to the deplorable economic situation, he replied with callous indifference that the unrest in Madras was not the result of economic depression but was politically engineered by the Home Rulers. He also held the latter responsible for weakening the respect for authority and the popular belief in the efficiency of the Government.<sup>22</sup>

Pentland however had found ample time to devote to war activities which were carried on at fever pitch. He started the "Madras War Fund" by voluntary subscriptions. He quickened the industrial enterprise by grandiosely organising the two Madras Exhibitions in 1915 and 1917 which yielded a substantial surplus for the War Fund. Since his homeland was engaged in meeting the worst crisis of its history everything else was subordinated to that crude fact. Pentland would not certainly tolerate the nonsense of any political discussion much less the growing nationalist upsurge in the Presidency when Britain was in peril. In his biased views about the Congress-League Scheme and the Memorandum of the "Nineteen" and his apathy towards Home Rulers, Pentland had his never-failing patron in the Anglo-Indian paper *The Madras Mail*. It was his active hostility to the Home Rulers that landed Pentland in a labyrinth of complexities.

The Madras Presidency which was second to none in India in making tremendous sacrifices during the war awaited in vain the British redemption of their War pledge to assign to India her right-

ful place in the Empire. Their inaction over the Congress-League Scheme was another major cause for the political storm brewing in the Presidency. The internment of Besant and her colleagues fanned the flame. Meetings were organised in different places by the Madras Provincial Congress Committee, the Home Rule League and the Madras Mahajana Sabha to remind the Government of its promise to confer the rights of self-determination on India *before* and not *after* the war ended.

#### *Groundwork for Reforms:*

Towards the close of the year 1916, Lionel Curtis, the English “theorist” and an expert on constitutional law visited Madras as a guest of Pentland. Curtis was a member of “Milner’s Kindergarten”<sup>\*</sup> and played a substantial role in the shaping of the Commonwealth. He authored the well known *The Commonwealth of Nations* in 1916. The celebrated system of “Diarchy” was generally believed to be the “brainwave” of Curtis. But the succeeding paragraphs would show that this idea could not be attributed to the wisdom of any single individual. Curtis’ visit to India<sup>\*\*</sup> was in connection with the imperial activities of the *Round Table* which was a quarterly journal founded by Curtis himself for the propagation of Liberal imperialist ideas. He was profoundly impressed by the *modus operandi* adopted in bringing about the reconciliation between the Boer and the British in South Africa. The way was prepared by *Round Table* which brought together representative men on both sides to discuss practical proposals *in camera*. Curtis was anxious to know whether a similar method could be adopted in Madras also. When Pentland arranged for a small gathering of only Europeans to meet Curtis he wanted to know whether the gentlemen present could recommend an equal number of representative Indians to make a similar *Round Table* with the Europeans. But the small gathering of Europeans present did not favour this idea. They were cocksure that Indians could not but succumb to the pressure on them “to report outside the circle what would be said inside it.”<sup>23</sup> Not in the least discouraged by this observation, Curtis sketched out the scheme called “Diarchy” a system of government by compartments. Among the members of the Gover-

\* The gifted youngmen who constituted the staff of Sir Alfred Milner, British High Commissioner in South Africa, became known as “Milner’s Kindergarten”.

\*\* During his sojourn in India, Curtis was so much drawn to the Hindu religion that he was anxious to become a Hindu himself.



nor's Executive Council, H.W.F. Gillmann was in favour of this system. He suggested a north-south division of the Presidency into Telugu and Tamil areas and the formation of two State Councils.<sup>24</sup>

Actually, the genesis for provincial autonomy, a notion conveyed by the term "diarchy", should be traced to the Royal Message issued on the occasion of the Coronation *Darbar* in Delhi in December 1911 when King George V and his Queen visited India. The crux of the problem of granting responsible government to representative Indian bodies was stated to be the difficulty in reconciling this ideal with the supreme authority of the Governor-General-in-Council. The only possible solution, according to the Royal Message, was to initially confer some measure of self-government on the provinces and to increase the powers steadily until at last India would consist of "a number of administrations autonomous in all provincial affairs, with the Government of India ordinarily restricting their functions to matters of imperial concern".<sup>25</sup>

This Royal Message was in turn based on the following historic despatch of Lord Hardinge of 29 August 1911: "The only possible solution would appear to be gradually to give the provinces a larger measure of self-government until at last India would consist of a number of administrations, autonomous in all provincial affairs with the government of India above them all and possessing power to interfere in cases of misgovernment but ordinarily restricting its functions to matters of imperial concern". The line of advance advocated by Hardinge was therefore not one of constitutionalism but of federalism and devolution. Since representative government as it obtained in Europe was unsuited to the genius of India he wanted the line of evolution in India to commence with the village community below and the devolution of power from above.

Even the term "diarchy" was not the creation of Curtis's or indeed, of any single brain. It was a product of the collective wisdom of many brains. Frederick William Duke, an Indian Civil Servant, is credited with a substantial role in building up this structure. When he was a member of the Council of India, which position he held after his retirement in November 1914, he often engaged himself in discussions on Imperial questions with a group of students associated with the *Round Table Quarterly Review* and some officials of the India Office on the constitutional framework for an Indian Government. During the course of such discussions

the novel idea of diarchy was hatched. The group prepared under Duke's lead during these years an unofficial document sketching the way in which an Indian Province might be governed under a scheme of "partial" responsibility. It would appear that this document was read by Chelmsford whose interest in it gave the document an importance unforeseen by the authors.<sup>26</sup> Of course, the idea of diarchy was much improved later. This improved form of governance was established in the provinces by the Government of India Act of 1919.

Under the system framed by Curtis, some provincial functions should be transferred to Indian Members chosen from and responsible to elected Legislative Councils, while others should continue to remain with the bureaucrats. E. S. Montagu, then Financial Secretary to the Treasury, was considerably influenced by this plan. Curtis's Scheme was considered to be a "priceless gift" that "statesmanship" could offer to India at that juncture.<sup>27</sup> The idea of diarchy came in particularly handy for Montagu and, when the opportunity came, he acted with the best of intentions. Certain aspects of the renowned Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms Scheme, which was formulated a year later and which marked a decisive stage in India's constitutional development, closely followed those which emanated from Curtis. Montagu resolved to bring about a drastic political reform, as the existing system was inflexible, ante-diluvian and unsuited, and left no room for progress. To quote his own words in the House of Commons on 12 July 1917: the Government of India was "too wooden, too iron, too inelastic and too ante-diluvian".

The opportunity for Montagu to act presented itself very soon. In the middle of 1917 a change in favour of Montagu took place in the India Office. On 12 July, Austen Chamberlain had resigned as a Court of Enquiry was to investigate his role in the mismanagement of the Mesopotamian Campaign which had seriously damaged the prestige of the Government of India. Montagu succeeded him much to the disadvantage of Pentland and his coterie. On 19 July Lady Pentland received a letter from Pentland ending with the hurriedly penned post script, "S of S for I!!\* Edwin Montagu!!"<sup>28</sup> Lloyd George was not in favour of giving Montagu the India Office. But Montagu whose "One mastering passion" of life was the welfare of India, would accept no other office. Writes his wife Venetia

\* Secretary of State for India.



Montagu in her preface to her husband's *Indian Diary* which she herself published after his demise: "... he joined Lloyd George's Cabinet in July 1917, only on condition that he should go to the India Office confident in the great work which he felt he could accomplish for the cause he had so much at heart".<sup>29</sup>

In view of his acquaintance with the constitutional set-up in India as well as his genuine zeal to serve India, Montagu deserved the elevation. As Parliamentary Under Secretary to the India Office for four years from 1910 under Morley\* and Crewe,\*\* he undertook the task of explaining their constitutional reforms to the House of Commons. He had also visited India in 1912.\*\*\*

The very first act of Montagu after assuming office as Secretary of State for India was to respond to the Congress-League Scheme by making a declaration on behalf of the coalition government. He made a momentous pledge on 20 August 1917 in the House of Commons to increase the association of Indians in every branch of the Indian administration. The Home Rule agitation was an important factor which influenced him to act as he did. The following was his historic declaration: "The policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of increasing the association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. They have decided that substantial steps in this direction should be taken as soon as possible and that it is of the highest importance as a preliminary to considering what these steps should be that there should be a free and informal exchange of opinion between those in authority at home and in India". The concluding sentences of the Secretary of State were: "I would add that progress in this policy can only be achieved by successive stages. The

\* Secretary of State for India (1905-10); formulated the Minto-Morley Reforms along with Viceroy Minto in 1908.

\*\* Secretary of State for India (1910-15); implemented the Minto-Morley Reforms.

\*\*\* In 1915, he entered the Cabinet as Chancellor of the Duchy and did much to popularise the First World War Loans and to set up voluntary war savings organisations. He served as Minister for Munitions from July to December 1916. He resigned in December 1916 along with the supporters of Asquith when Lloyd George took over as Prime Minister. Montagu wrote his private diary which is a valuable source of information during his second and more memorable tour of India in the winter of 1917-1918.

British Government and the Government of India, on whom the responsibility lies for the welfare and advancement of the Indian people, must be judges of the time and measure of each advance, and they must be guided by the cooperation received from those upon whom the new opportunities of service will thus be conferred and by the extent to which it is found that confidence can be reposed in their sense of responsibility. Ample opportunity will be afforded for public discussion of the proposals which will be submitted in due course to Parliament". This was evidence of Montagu's firm conviction that parliamentary institutions had the same value for Indians as for Englishmen. But the announcement itself was not made in Montagu's language but in terms drafted by Curzon who was then a Conservative member of the inner war cabinet under Lloyd George. Curiously enough, by introducing the term "responsible government" as the goal of the British, Curzon's draft pointed more definitely than Montagu's, to the well-known British model of an executive responsible to the legislature.<sup>30</sup>

Montagu also announced that in pursuance of this policy, he would shortly visit India to prepare the first step towards the announced goal by consultations with the Viceroy as well as the Governor of Provinces and also to hear the parties concerned in the execution of the Scheme on the spot.

Montagu's statement in Parliament was acclaimed by many English papers as a fresh landmark in the history of the relations between Great Britain and India. According to *The Times* of 21 August 1917 it was clearest and most definite official declaration of British aims in India since November 1858.<sup>31</sup>

Montagu's historical announcement did not however allay the fears of the Indian public as it failed to convey what they had been asking for since December 1916. It caused disappointment throughout India as it did not contain the fundamental principles of the Congress-League Scheme which urged Britain for a substantial first step followed by definite stages for the establishment of responsible government within a given time. The language of the declaration was also felt to be extremely vague. The goal of self-government as per the statement of Montagu could be reached only by successive stages depending upon the performances of those entrusted with new responsibilities. And whether they showed themselves fit for the task or not would be evaluated by the Government of India and the Imperial Government. To the Nationalists, it was one more bombastic utterance with which the Indian public was only "too familiar during the last few months and it will fall



flat on the country". It was therefore characterised to be "an insipid, uninspiring and disappointing declaration".<sup>32</sup>

Soon after Montagu's announcement the Madras Provincial Congress convened a special session in August 1917. It was decided thereat to hold aloof from the Government and non-co-operate with Montagu when he visited the Presidency unless Besant and company were released. There arose a slight difference of opinion on this matter when some men headed by V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, M. Ramachandra Rao, B.N. Sarma\* and V.P. Madhava Rao\*\* felt that the moment was inopportune to seek recourse to passive resistance. They were not hostile to passive resistance but only favoured such passive resistance as might be involved in disregarding the prohibitory orders of Government against meetings and processions. But the next day the tide turned when G.A. Natesan's amendment to approve of passive resistance without qualification was carried.<sup>33</sup> So the Presidency as a whole became committed to that course. But this difference of opinion provided a handle to anti-Home Rulers to misinterpret it as a cleavage between the Moderates and the Extremists (by which name they chose to call the Nationalists). They counselled the Government that while promising to go forward with the reform scheme they should announce that no person taking part in the passive resistance would be eligible for membership in the Legislative Councils or for any post under the crown. "Those who are determined to dissociate themselves from the State should be dissociated from it" wrote *The Madras Mail*.<sup>34</sup>

However, the subsequent release of Besant reversed the conditions in the Presidency. The Nationalists, genuinely anxious to reciprocate the gesture of goodwill shown by the India Office in ordering the release of the internees, took all efforts to make the stay of Montagu in Madras calm and smooth. But enraged at the leniency shown to Besant the Europeans and their newspapers resolved to obstruct all reforms.

### *Montagu's visit to Madras:*

Letters received by the prominent leaders in the Presidency from their British friends in England since Montagu's announcement on 20 August 1917 were replete with entreaties craving sympathy for and co-operation with Montagu.<sup>35</sup> About Montagu's

\* Member, Imperial Legislative Council; Moderate leader.

\*\* Dewan of Mysore.

genuine anxiety to create in India a new atmosphere of trust and confidence, there could be no two opinions. He debated privately his plan which was still on the anvil. He had frank conversations with experts in England on constitutional points so that he might be convinced of the practicability of the suggestions proposed to be made in the scheme. His difficulty was a three-fold one: first, how far the Congress-League Scheme was practicable, the extent to which it was defective, and what must be done to remedy the defects; second, how far a Liberal Minister in a Cabinet preponderantly conservative, could carry both the Government and the Parliament with him; and third, what support would he receive from India in his big fight against the forces of reaction, i.e. the conservative section.<sup>36</sup> The two pillars of the Government were Curzon and Milner and he was always apprehensive that the former would obstruct his reforms proposals.

Montagu came to India with an open mind. He was prepared to modify his scheme if discussions would convince him to that effect. He came with a small delegation, consisting of equal number of civil servants and politicians. His choice of Duke from among his Council to accompany him was significant. And Duke played a far greater part in shaping the Reforms than Montagu was willing to acknowledge. Montagu toured the provinces of India from 10 November 1917 to 23 April 1918, ascertaining the wishes of the public as to their future form of Government. He was unsparing in his pains to personally persuade, convince and even cajole doubters as well as opponents of his scheme — Indian or European. For the first time in the annals of British India, Indian opinion was consulted. Apart from framing a scheme for submission to parliament, Montagu also decided to compile a report on the lines of the historic Durham report which led to Canadian self-Government.<sup>37</sup>

Montagu and party along with Viceroy Chelmsford arrived in Madras on 14 December 1917. Access to the Secretary of State was so cautiously regulated by the bureaucracy whose interference in the selection of deputations and of persons for interview with him hurt many. Such segregation of him made it impossible for the Secretary of State to move with all classes of people and to obtain first hand knowledge of the conditions in the Presidency.\* This exasperated Montagu who was keen to utilise his visit to obtain

\* In India as a whole, no conference was arranged with non-officials during Montagu's visit because if one such were held, Tilak and Gandhiji would have to be invited which Montagu did not seem to have favoured.



from popular leaders of the Presidency a friendly reception and support for his reforms proposals when they were published. It was indeed a humiliating situation for public-spirited men to be denied "free access to Mr. Montagu and the ban on the Secretary of State in regard to social engagements is a proceeding of which the authors need scarcely congratulate themselves".<sup>38</sup>

Arrangements were made for the non-Brahman leaders to be introduced to the Secretary of State. Unafraid of speaking their minds, they declared themselves against the grant of anything resembling Home Rule. They would not tolerate any weakening of the British control over India. They emphasised the necessity of communal representation and a diarchical system of Government. Referring to the schism in the Hindu community caused by the antagonism between the Brahmans and the non-Brahmans, the deputation impressed on the Secretary of State that the Congress was predominantly Brahman and was non-communal only in principle. This prompted Montagu to record that the *Brahmanophobia* "is a great feature in which this country (Madras) differs from any I have yet visited".<sup>39</sup> This impression is also partially responsible for the following descriptive account of India as a whole in chapter VI of the joint report: "... there runs through Indian Society a series of cleavages of religion, race and caste which constantly threaten its solidarity and of which any wise political sense must take heed".

From the Muslim community members of the Muslim League and non-members met him separately. About this time, there occurred a split in the Muslim League in the Presidency. The Prince of Arcot, who was originally a signatory to the Muslim League representation, had subsequently resigned from the League without explanation. He started thereafter his own association and presented an address nine days after the last date on which addresses had to be submitted. Yet, the Government of Madras accepted it.<sup>40</sup> Among the others, who gained access to Montagu, the ulemas of Madras expressed their strong opposition to Home Rule. They said, "we does (sic) not want Home Rule". Their leader, "a delightful old man", said authoritatively that none of the holy books such as the Koran and the Bible contained in them sanction for Home Rule!<sup>41</sup>

Among the leaders who called on him individually Montagu was strongly attracted to V. S. Srinivasa Sastri and C. P. Ramaswami Iyer. Both struck him as men of great intelligence and extra-

ordinary charm. He met them on more than one occasion. Sastri, "a thoroughly sound man" as Montagu described him, argued in favour of the Congress-League Scheme but finally agreed to accept any scheme which fulfilled four conditions: (1) There must be elements of progress and a guarantee of progress in the scheme itself; (2) the step must be substantial and not hedged round; (3) India should have fiscal liberty; and (4) there should be absolute equality between races. Sastri was also anxious that Britain should invite a deputation of Indians to England.<sup>42</sup> Montagu was even more drawn to C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer whom he refers to as "the attractive Ramaswamy Iyer", and "the cleverest man I have ever met". Ramaswamy Iyer told him during the interview that for the first time he was speaking frankly as man to man on political matters with any man in high office. That was enough for Montagu to understand what sort of government they had in their Presidency. Ramaswamy Iyer was keenly sensitive about the "absurd" accusations brought against the Brahmans and expressed his anxiety that such misrepresentations should disappear. He was awfully angry at the efforts of the Madras Government to put an end to the practice of receiving deputations. In answer to the accusation that the Home Rule Movement was a Brahman movement, he himself got 800 non-Brahmans of consequence in the Presidency to attest that it was not so. It was to be presented to the Secretary of State. But permission was refused "until the very night of your arrival", he told Montagu. He himself offered to fix the maximum number of seats that the Brahmans should win in Madras but he would not have separate representation. Montagu also felt that Ramaswamy Iyer's method was better although he saw no necessity for communitywise representation in the Council. When Montagu asked Ramaswamy Iyer point blank what he would accept Ramaswamy Iyer promptly conveyed his agreement with Srinivasa Sastri's four criteria. But he would never accept periodic reviews of the progress made by the Imperial Government. He wanted "a time limit and there is much more in this time limit than people really believe". Giving his impressions of Ramaswamy Iyer after the first interview, Montagu says that he "would do brilliantly at the English Bar. . . . He is very extreme, but very, very, very able. He tied us completely into knots".<sup>43</sup>

After becoming the Secretary of the Congress in February 1918, Ramaswamy Iyer met Montagu at Delhi. The latter then put before him the new Reforms Scheme he had worked out. Approving it



Ramaswamy Iyer told him that it was essential for the Secretary of State to get on his side C. Sankaran Nair\* who wielded “much more influence than any other Indian”.<sup>44</sup> But Sankaran Nair did not in the least attract Montagu. On the contrary, Montagu’s initial impression was that Sankaran Nair was highly belligerent and “vily mannered”.<sup>45</sup> He had a most trying time with Sankaran Nair whose behaviour clearly suggested that he was out to wreck. It is very difficult for one to reconcile this bellicosity with Montagu’s subsequent appointment of Sankaran Nair for a seat on the India Council which the latter readily accepted. Nair remained at the White Hall until 1921.

T.M. Nair, the leader of the non-Brahman Movement was also willing to accept the Reforms Scheme provided representation would be on a communal basis on which he was “very fierce”. He gave Montagu a catalogue of his grievances against the Brahmans who had wronged him. In the words of Montagu T.M. Nair was “most eloquent, rather impressive and a vigorous personality, but he had obviously got a bee in his bonnet, because he explained that the Home Rule Movement was financed by German money. His sole authority for the statement seemed to be that once they were poor and now they were rich”.<sup>46</sup>

The interview of Montagu with S. Subrahmania Iyer which turned out to be violent has been recounted elsewhere.\*\* He had interviews with the editors of the prominent newspapers like *The Hindu* (English) and the *Swadesamitran* (Tamil). Besant met him as President of the Indian National Congress in which capacity she would be leading the Indian political movement during 1918. She insisted on her being left alone with Montagu as she could have no free discussions with him in the presence of an official by whom she was likely to be interned when Montagu left.<sup>47</sup> Later meeting him at Delhi, she asked of him an assurance that no action would be taken against papers for criticising his report. Montagu readily gave the assurance provided, of course, the criticism was “done decently and you do not fire the public imagination against officials”.

Towards the close of his visit Montagu was taken by Pentland to the Second Industrial Exhibition got up to raise funds for the war. This exhibition which was immensely popular for the quality and variety of the exhibits displayed, was housed in a building specially designed for it by W.H. Nicholls, the Government archi-

\* Member for Education on the Viceroy’s Executive Council.

\*\* *Supra* Chapter Three; pp.117–18.

tect. But Montagu had not a word of praise for it. He had not considered it worth-while even to mention it in his diary although he had not forgotten to record his impression of the Madras Zoo which was "beyond words bad". Nor was he pleased with the Garden Party got up in his honour at the Government House. To him, it was an interminable "party with 850 people . . . grossly mismanaged. . . . I was left to be stared at by everybody and quite unable to find anybody to talk to . . . leaving me absolutely in the lurch".<sup>48</sup> Gilbert Slater who attended the Garden Party notes: "I saw him (Montagu) a tall, lean figure, stalking gloomily about, apparantly neither giving nor receiving pleasure from conversation with the people who were introduced to him. His diary shows that my impression was pretty correct".<sup>49</sup>

Montagu had already no high opinion of Pentland's Government. This could be attributed to the Governor's handling of the Besant affair. If Pentland had not made a "fool of himself last year about Mrs. Besant," wrote Polak, "the situation would to-day be much easier".<sup>50</sup> For their part, the Madras Government smarting under wounded prestige caused by Montagu's action in reference to Besant, was not particularly enthusiastic about making his sojourn in Madras fruitful. As a result, Montagu received very little encouragement in this Presidency for his proposed reforms. The atmosphere in Madras was far from cordial. The Members of Pentland's Council felt unanimously that the subject of reforms should not have been raised before the war ended. They were at pains to impress on him how greatly he had injured the prestige of their government by undoing their act in the case of Besant. But it only served to rouse his "resentment instead of contrition".<sup>51</sup>

Montagu left Madras with a deeper distaste for it as was evinced by his description of its Government as an "impossible institution". He was vexed that the Government of this Presidency under Pentland made no contribution worth its name to the discussion of matters he had come to deal with. He notes contemptuously: "The Government of India letters and circulars are answered on half sheets of note-papers; the whirlwind rages around them; political storms wax and menace and they remain obstructive, angry, sullen and effortless".\*<sup>52</sup>

\* Montagu's dislike for Pentland continued even after the latter ceased to be the Governor of Madras. He sneered at him at a meeting in London, where Pentland was present, making him very unhappy. (V.S. Srinivasa Sastri to Ramaswamy, 12 June 1919, *Srinivasa Sastri Papers*).



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## CHAPTER SIX

# Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms: The Report And The Act

The Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms prepared by Montagu, Secretary of State for India and Chelmsford, Viceroy of India, was completed and signed on Monday 22 April 1918 at Simla. This scheme which made a great impact on the Indo-British relations by placing India for the first time on the straight road to responsible government, was largely the work of Montagu. It was Montagu's Report notwithstanding the loyal and generous support extended by his co-author. Montagu richly deserves kudos of the generations to come on his success in getting an agreed report after labouring without respite for a period of five months and twelve days in India.

However, the general impression that a reader would be compelled to form from the "uncensored" Diary of the Secretary of State is that he ploughed a lonely furrow, the Viceroy contributing precious little to the great task. But this was far from the truth. No doubt, temperamentally, Montagu and Chelmsford were poles apart. Montagu, noted for his extreme impatience, could brook no delay in finalising the Reforms Scheme. He worked on it even during his illness. Chelmsford, on the other hand, noted for his almost "unexampled patience" was inclined to counsel enormous patience in shaping a new scheme which was the first of its kind. Then the fact that a majority of his official advisers were opposed to the immediate granting of any radical measure of self-government to India caused Chelmsford to be cautious in his response to Montagu's proposals. This could have been the cause for the dejection and despondency shown not unoften by Montagu during his stay in India. This overcautiousness of Chelmsford was also the basis for the allegation that the movement which led to the announcement of 20 August 1917 was a conspiracy by the Secretary of State himself into which he had led an unwilling and unfortunate Viceroy. Montagu had reiterated that this conspiracy theory was a travesty

of truth and that the movement was started by Hardinge and was continued by Chelmsford.

Notwithstanding the temperamental differences, Montagu amply acknowledged the earnestness and sincerity of Chelmsford and the co-operation offered by him in accomplishing the high mission. He paid a high tribute to his judgement, his steadfastness of purpose in pursuing what he thought was right, his complete lack of prejudice and remarkable patience. Stating that they were jointly responsible for the Report, Montagu pointed out that they "walked together, neither being unwillingly harnessed together".<sup>1</sup> Even after reaching England, Montagu was almost in daily communication with Chelmsford. And the latter was in touch with the heads of all the Provinces and every expression of support, no matter from what quarter it came, was carefully relayed to Montagu.<sup>2</sup>

It would be very amusing to learn that as the Report was drawing to a close, Chelmsford became obsessed with the idea that as the Viceroy of India he should sign it first. A large-hearted Montagu responded by suggesting that the two signatures should be affixed to the Report side by side. And this was accepted. Writes Montagu, "It seems ridiculous, but it made him happier, and after all it is a unique occasion which demands a unique form of signature".<sup>3</sup>

The drafting of the report, under severe time limits, was done by William Marris, Joint Secretary to the Government of India.

Montagu discussed the report in its final stage not only with Europeans but also with Indian leaders. L. Curtis was in whole-hearted agreement with it. The Indian leaders who were consulted were also in agreement with the salient features of the report.<sup>4</sup> The Moderate leaders were greatly impressed with Montagu's "personality, his honesty, earnestness and sincerity of purpose. . . If they were only half converts to his scheme, they had become full converts to Montagu himself".<sup>5</sup>

The report was published on 8 July 1918. It was a document of 177 pages covering a wide ground although the operative part of the proposals was confined to Chapters VIII to XI. After examining the Congress-League Scheme in 19 paragraphs (159-177) under chapter VIII, the authors dismissed it on the ground that the proposals contained therein were "without precedent"; "fatal to good government"; and constituted the very "negation of responsible government".<sup>6</sup> What their own proposals actually offered to Indians were substantial concession in local self-government, very partial provincial autonomy and absolutely no control over the Imperial



Government. These were the facts admitted by the authors themselves in para 353 of their report. Montagu was considerably influenced by his political mentor L. Curtis whose proposal, he felt, was the best that one could offer to India.<sup>7</sup> He had deduced many “variations” from the latter’s scheme, always with two aims—that the reforms should be as drastic as possible and that it should bear his own stamp.<sup>8</sup> Curtis’s statement in his *Problems of the Commonwealth* that the “people of India and Egypt must be gradually schooled in the management of the national affairs” must be compared with the following observation in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report: “We make it plain that such limitation on powers as we are now proposing are due only to the obvious fact that time is necessary in order to train representatives and electorates for the work which we desire them to undertake and that we offer Indians opportunities at short intervals to prove the progress they are making and to make good their claim not by the method of agitation but by positive demonstration to the further stages of self-government which we have just indicated”.

But Montagu’s vanity stood in the way of fully acknowledging his debt to Curtis. Montagu says that many of Curtis’s conclusions were those which he and Duke had already tentatively arrived at individually and that he was opposed only to the sub-provincial system strongly recommended by Curtis. If the Secretary of State’s vanity would not permit him to admit his debt to his fellow countryman it would be un wisdom to expect him to give India the recognition due to her. There is every reason to believe that the reforms of the nature proposed had had their origin in the Indian soil. The historic announcement of Montagu in the wake of the submission of the Congress-League Scheme, the Reforms proposals and the mode of finalisation through extensive interaction with eminent political leaders in India clearly point to the Scheme’s having its roots in the Indian soil also. Self-government is not the gift of the British intellect. The Indian intellectuals had vastly contributed to shaping it.

The cardinal features of the report were: At the centre, the Imperial Legislative Council was to be converted into a bicameral legislature with a Legislative Assembly and a Council of State; the functions and powers of the Legislative Assembly were to be curtailed; the Governor-General was to be empowered to dissolve the Assembly and the whole executive, as before, was to be responsible to the Secretary of State for India and the British Parliament.

In the provincial sphere, it purported to introduce partial provincial autonomy freeing it from central control. There would be a form of diarchy consequent upon the splitting of the Executive Government into two compartments—*Reserved* and *Transferred*. Vital subjects like law and order, revenue and other equally important subjects were reserved to the control of the Governor-in-Council who were responsible, as before, to the Government of India. Those departments “which afford most opportunity for local knowledge and social service” were transferred to the Indian Ministers responsible to the provincial legislatures. On the *transferred* subjects, the Ministers’ decisions would be final, subject only to the Governor’s advice and control. The authors said in para 219: “We do not contemplate that from the outset the Governor should occupy the position of a purely Constitutional Governor who is bound to accept the decisions of his Ministers”. The Ministers were appointed for the duration of the legislatures so that they would not fall on an adverse vote and would be responsible only to their own constituencies. Having decided against a bicameral legislature in the provinces, the authors devised a novel form of unicameral arrangement. They provided for the appointment of the Grand Committee which was a microcosm of the existing legislature and to which the Legislative Councils were subordinated. The Grand Committee would be chosen for each Bill: in case of the *reserved* subjects partly by vote and partly by nomination. The Governor was given powers to nominate just enough members to secure the passage of the Bill. Of the members so chosen, not more than two-thirds would be officials.<sup>9</sup> The report also provided for the institution of a Statutory Commission at the end of ten years to consider the possibility of further extension of responsible government.

Communal representation was given only to Mohammadans; in the Punjab it was extended to the Sikhs. The Report left certain matters for future settlement in the light of the advice of the two committees—the Subject and Franchise Committees. These committees were to enquire in India into questions connected with franchise and with division of functions between the Government and with popular elements in local Government.

### *Reactions to the Report:*

Forces were set to work well in advance in England to secure for the Report that amount of approval which was essential to “pre-



clude a critical examination of the scheme on its merits and discount in advance all adverse criticism regarding it".<sup>10</sup> This extreme precaution should be attributed not only to the antipathy of the conservative element in England towards any reforms for India but also to the anti-Reform, nay, anti-Montagu attitude of the European community and the writings of the Anglo-Indian Press in India. Widest publicity was given to what was acclaimed to be a significant change in the British attitude towards the Indian constitutional problem. The development of the much talked of responsible government was interpreted to mean the development of parliamentary or Cabinet Government of the British type for which the system of diarchy was to serve as a training. The efforts proved successful for there was a "chorus" of approval by the British newspapers—Conservative as well as Liberal—of the Reforms Scheme which was acclaimed as one of the greatest political experiments in history. These papers published in advance articles imploring the public to rally to Montagu's support. *The London Times*, *The Daily News*, *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Nation* were all unanimous in eulogising the Scheme as the essence of British Statesmanship whose success or failure lay in the "good behaviour" and "justificatory conduct" of the Indians themselves. *Reuter* cabled that it was hailed throughout England as a most important State document in British history. In fine, even before the Report appeared in cold print, the impression had gained ground in England that India's political future was doomed unless the Scheme was accepted and implemented.

A long interval elapsed between the publication of the Report in July 1918 and the grant of Royal Assent to the Act of Parliament based on the report in December 1919. The interim period gave ample time for a thorough examination of the entire report. The authors themselves invited full and public discussions in paragraph 354 of the Report so that their proposals could be completely and carefully studied by the local Governments with whom they conferred but before whom they had not the opportunity to place the Scheme in its final form. The intervening spell of nearly a year and a half enabled criticism also to develop rapidly. Discontent among the disappointed sections grew steadily. In England, the Sydenham\* coterie and its press hurled the "fullest abuse" at

\* Governor of Bombay (1907-13); prosecuted Tilak and sentenced him to imprisonment at Mandalay; in 1913, was raised to a peerage.

Montagu and Chelmsford and at the Indian National Movement.<sup>11</sup>

*Nationalists' view :*

The publication of the Montford Report had strikingly revealed the fundamental differences between the Nationalist and Moderate sections of the Congress. If in the rest of India there were only these two schools of thought among those who considered and responded to the Reforms Scheme, in Madras, there existed three spectra of opinion. The first group comprised those among the Congress—the Nationalists—who took the extreme step of rejecting the Scheme *in toto*. This section made the utmost use of the opportunity to discuss, debate and dissect the report. The various public meetings which it organised in all the districts of the Presidency starting with the one at Thottayam in Trichinopoly showed the trend of popular opinion in the Presidency about the Scheme. The Madras Mahajana Sabha discussed the Scheme in great detail at four public meetings held on 17, 20, 27 and 31 July 1918. In pursuance of the resolution subsequently adopted by the Sabha, a memorandum prepared by B.N. Sarma was sent to the Madras Government on 28 August 1918.<sup>12</sup> K. Vyasa Rao\* delivered three lectures on the Reforms Scheme from 17 to 19 July with Kasturiranga Iyengar in the chair. The meeting placed on record that steps should be taken forthwith throughout India to enlighten the British public on the Indian opinion of the Scheme and that it repudiated the basic assumption of the Scheme namely, India was unfit for complete self-rule.<sup>13</sup>

The Congress whose demands were hitherto confined to reforms and self-government had by now, under Gandhiji's leadership, pledged to fight for *Purna Swaraj* or complete independence for India by non-violent means. In keeping with this pledge, the nationalist leaders of the Congress in the Presidency declared at public meetings that they should have to reject the Reforms Scheme altogether since it failed to meet their demand even half-way. It promised the people freedom in instalments, and on probation; they had to subject themselves to a supervised training in democracy which was deemed by the British an indispensable prelude for self-rule. In their view, what little hope was raised by the pledge of His Majesty's Government in their August Declaration was betrayed

\* Reputed Journalist; a regular contributor to *The Hindu*.



by this Scheme of “phantom” reform. They were disenchanted with the authors of the Scheme who adopted the “Anglo-Indian view” that responsible government in India could not be ushered in unless the traditional ideal of the relations between the ruler and the ruled were radically revolutionised. Such a radical change, it was implied, required a sustained and prolonged educational campaign.<sup>14</sup> Montagu was obviously much influenced by men like William Archer who dismissed the ideal of a unified India as a myth. According to Archer, India as a nation, was non-existent: it was no accomplished reality, but a far off ideal, and till that ideal was realised, India had to sustain her ties with Britain.

The nationalist papers like *The Hindu* and the *New India* found nothing good in the Scheme. They published letters and articles explicating the powers conferred on the bureaucracy under the Scheme and the mischief they were capable of. The last instalment of a serial article in *The Hindu* began thus: “When the lion and the lamb shall sit at a common table and discuss and demonstrate the advantages of a vegetarian diet, then will the bureaucracy act on its own volition in concert with the opinion of the people—a people from whom it is divided by barriers of race, to whose representatives it has persistently denied any political capacity, and whose progress is so directly dependent upon its readiness to surrender not only its own powers but of principles dear to its heart such as the whiteman’s burden and the pre-ordained servitude of tropical races”.<sup>15</sup> Besant described the Scheme as a “bitter insult to a suffering people”.\* Immediately after the publication of the report orders were received at the Post Offices in the Punjab to confiscate copies of Besant’s *New India*.<sup>16</sup> It was feared that the proscription of *New India* would be speedily followed by that of other newspapers.

S. Subrahmanya Iyer declared that the Scheme was another instance of breach of faith on the part of Britain. After deluding the people into believing that the British Cabinet itself would put forward a scheme for their consideration, they had brought forth, a scheme adopting a “crooked procedure” he said. The implication of this criticism was that inasmuch as the Scheme had not received official cabinet endorsement, it stood on the same footing as the Congress-League Scheme. An irate editor of the pro-British *Madras Mail* retorted: “We need hardly point out the radical difference

\* For her subsequent changed attitude see chapter Four.

between a scheme fashioned by the most experienced administrators in India, endorsed with the joint names of the Viceroy and the Secretary of State and an unauthoritative production such as that put forward by the Congress and the Muslim League".<sup>17</sup>

The Nationalists of the Presidency were thus firm in their opinion that it would be impracticable to co-operate in working a Scheme which had begun at the wrong end inasmuch as it gave partial autonomy only to provinces. Any reform should begin at the national level, with the whole of India, and then provide for the devolution of authority to the provinces. They would much rather continue in their existing position and work out the future course of action than accept what Montagu was proffering. They disapproved of the changes suggested at the central level since these changes were detrimental to the emergence of responsible self-government. They deprecated the novel system of diarchy as reactionary and deleterious to the interests of the people. They deplored the unfettered authority conferred on the Governor in both the *reserved* and the *transferred* halves in many directions. They were distressed about the deep distrust evinced by the authors of the Scheme in the fitness and capacity of the Indians to govern themselves.<sup>18</sup> For instance, the guiding principle for division of subjects was to include under the *transferred* list only "those departments which afford most opportunity for local knowledge and social service, those in which Indians have shown themselves to be keenly interested, those in which mistakes may occur which, though serious, would not be irremediable". The cardinal principles of the Scheme rested on the assumption that the Indians were unfit to share in the responsibility of maintaining peace, order and good government in their own country. In other words, India was unfit for Home Rule.

In justification of this theory, a lopsided description of India highlighting her poverty and ignorance was given in Chapter VI of the Report. It dwelt at length on the immensity of India's problems—general conditions in India, extent of illiteracy, widespread poverty, apathy of the masses to political issues, relation between the politically awakened classes and the masses and the divisions in Indian Society.<sup>19</sup> The account given therein was not totally untrue. But the inferences sought to be drawn therefrom were not fair. Poverty and ignorance of the masses were wrongly clubbed together and were then adduced as reasons for the denial of the right to self-government.



Montagu and Chelmsford purported to offer a brand new political structure by sweeping the existing machinery—central and provincial. This was sought to be done under the veneer of initiating a responsible government for the first time; but, at the same time, the ultimate authority of the government of the country was vested “more thoroughly” in the hands of the bureaucrats.<sup>20</sup>

*Moderates' view:*

The second group represented by the moderate section of the Congress held that the Scheme must be *prima facie* accepted but modifications thereon should be insisted upon. They were against abandoning the Scheme altogether. This group represented by men like V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer, Surendranath Banerjee, C.Y. Chintamani and other Moderate leaders spoke and wrote very much alike on the new political situation, although they were all until that moment, firm adherents to the Congress-League Scheme. The Montford Reforms Scheme did not meet substantially the basic demand of the Congress-League Scheme. Only in November 1917, a few days after Montagu's arrival in India, Banerjee told Montagu emphatically that the Congress-League Scheme was the least that he would accept. No less strong was Sastri's advocacy of the Scheme.<sup>21</sup> Speaking on the Scheme he had said, “while there are many authorities, high or low, in the country ready to deprecate, ready to intern and exclude, there is none—sad enough—high or low, to speak a word of hope, to hold out to the coming generations the promise of freedom for which England had always stood, for which she is striving to-day and for which both England and India are together striving with one mind and one heart”.<sup>22</sup>

The reason for this abrupt change in their attitude was not far to seek. They were the men who were taken into confidence by Montagu. Montagu disclosed to them in advance the outstanding features of his scheme of political reforms. It was only natural that in their confabulations Montagu had elicited a promise that they would extend their support to his proposals. Chintamani and Srinivasa Sastri told Montagu in May 1918 that they would take a final decision on the Scheme as a whole after its publication. Montagu required that if their original favourable impression was confirmed, they should endeavour to get the Scheme accepted by the country. He said he would be satisfied with their approval of the general lines on which the reforms were laid and would welcome

well-reasoned criticism so that in the event of strong demand for changes, he could press it on the Parliament and the cabinet. Assuming that their opinion would be favourable, Sastri wrote to Chintamani that the moment the report appeared, wherever they might be at that time, they should make known their general approval of the Scheme—Chintamani through his own paper the *Leader* and Sastri through some daily in Madras or Bombay.<sup>23</sup> Sapru and Surendranath Banerjee were also agreeable to this plan but not Malaviya. The latter advocated agitation both in India and in England against Montagu's Scheme. He differed so bitterly from them as to remark that Sapru and Sastri were only "too ready to pick up any crumbs that might fall from Montagu's table".<sup>24</sup>

In the first flush of enthusiasm Banerjee's *Bengali* and Chintamani's *Leader* welcomed the report as aiming at a "real and substantial" reform. Sastri paid tributes to the statesmanship of Montagu and Chelmsford. The speeches of some of the protagonists of the Scheme raised the doubt whether they had made a profound and critical study of it. For instance, it was stated that the Scheme envisaged a complete separation of Provincial and Imperial revenues and that the former would be administered by the provincial authorities subject to the payment of a contribution to the Government of India. Actually, it was the local officials who were given greater freedom in this sphere; the people had no say in financial administration. The freedom accorded to the local officials *vis-a-vis* the Government of India "will prejudice the interests of the people to a greater degree than at present".<sup>25</sup> Their failure to perceive this implication was amazing. They were equally wrong in concluding that the extension of franchise and the elective majority would lead to the dominance of the popular element in the Legislative Councils. "We shall be the makers of our law" declared Banerjee who did not realise that the constitution and powers of the new legislative Councils had been so changed under the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme as to increase the strength of the Executive at the expense of the elected Legislature. Under the pre-reform constitution, no laws could be passed except by the Legislative Council save emergency ordinances by the executive head. But under the new Scheme if the legislature, composed of elected representatives of the people, refused to pass a Bill, the Executive Government could get it enacted by means of the Grand Committee in the Provinces and the Council of State at the centre. Both these were official-ridden bodies. Neither the local nor the Imperial Legislative Council could get laws passed



if the same were not approved by the Grand Committee or the Council of State as well as the head of the executive Government. The latter had the right of veto upon the legislative measures passed. The executive had also the power to dissolve the legislatures which was a retrograde step. It is pertinent to observe that, among the continental Governments, the power of dissolution was used only in Germany in order to break down resistance in the Reichstag: it was used for this purpose on three memorable occasions in 1878, 1887 and 1893. It passed one's understanding as to how Montagu, the benevolent reformer chose to borrow "a provision from the exceptional constitutional procedure of Germany and proposed the insertion of a measure which is unneeded and reactionary".<sup>26</sup>

The Moderates also sought to minimise the strength of the veto power of the executive head. They argued that the legislatures would hold the purse strings of the province or the nation. In doing so, they doubtless relied on the "comforting but baseless" theory that the veto would not be used.

The Moderates who failed to perceive the implication of many provisions of the Scheme felt no qualms about denigrating S. Subrahmanya Iyer who said that it deserved a strong, wholesale and prompt rejection. Because he made the statement before the Scheme was published, *Leader* the Moderate organ, made a not very rational statement that Subrahmanya Iyer could not have read a single line of it. The great Liberal P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer emphatically averred that Subrahmanya Iyer "did not read a single line of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, but was ready to denounce it. The spell exercised on his mind by Mrs. Besant and the Home Rule Movement then in full swing accounted for his refusal to look into the book".<sup>27</sup> It did not occur to the opponents that there were easy means of his knowing in advance the broad outlines of it. The Report was published on 8 July 1918. The very same day *New India* published a supplementary wherein Besant stated that she could not change the view she had formed of an earlier draft of the report in the discussion of which she had the privilege to participate some months earlier. Again the signatories to a Manifesto issued by eminent Nationalists of Madras under the lead of C. Vijayaraghavachari also had prior knowledge of the outlines of the Reforms Scheme. They had cherished a fond hope that, before appearing in cold print, many essential modifications suggested at various levels would have been incorporated. The Manifesto signed among others

by Kasturirange Iyengar, Rajaji, A. Rangaswamy Iyengar, T.S.S. Rajan and V.O. Chidambaram Pillai declared that the Scheme was “so radically wrong alike in principles and in detail that in our opinion it is impossible to modify and improve it. It cannot consequently form the basis of discussion or compromise by the people or their representatives”.<sup>28</sup>

However, even the Moderate leaders were then obliged to accept two facts: that the powers of the Government of India were practically left untouched by the Scheme; and that there would be no responsible government worth its name without granting the people substantial measure of control in the Central Government. Banerjee too had to acknowledge that “The number of elected members is increased but no real power is given to the Council. The Government of India remains as autocratic as before. . . . There is no hope, no promise of even a beginning made in respect of responsible government within a decade”.<sup>29</sup> In other words, Indians were not offered scope for self-governance at any level—local, provincial or central—in the Scheme.

#### *Loyalists' view :*

The peculiar situation in the Presidency was that it had yet another group which had been right from the outset opposed to any reforms scheme which in its view would lead to Brahman *raj*.\* Nevertheless, this loyalist group accepted the Scheme when it perceived that Reforms had become a *fait accompli*. Even this group comprising the members of the non-Brahman Justice party sought a singular modification, namely, communal representation.

Regarding the views of the Indian bureaucrats, one could very well imagine their predicament. For instance, as a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, Sankaran Nair was bound to support the Scheme in public even if he disagreed with the other members on any issue discussed within the Cabinet. What was beyond one's comprehension was his repeated encomia on Montagu and his “minion”, considering the fact that the salient features of the Scheme were at variance with many of his own opinions on India's constitutional development.<sup>30</sup> As for the recalcitrant elements in Britain, soon after the declaration made by Montagu on 20 August 1917, some retired Anglo-Indians and other reactionaries formed

\* Supra Chapter Two.



the Indo-British Association in England to carry on anti-India propaganda. To counter it Besant and Tilak decided to send a Home Rule Deputation to England. The deputation left in the middle of March 1918 but when it reached Gibraltar, it was told that its passports had been cancelled under instruction from the British War Cabinet.

The Europeans in India also formed a similar association—the European Defence Association which was later changed into European Association. In 1917, the impending Reforms prompted it to activate its efforts. Very soon, branches were formed all over India and propaganda was started deprecating the Reforms Proposals.

The Indian Civil Service was also opposed to introducing any political reforms in India. In 1918, several Civil Service associations were formed which circulated letters opposing the Reforms. A Madras circular somehow found its way to the office of the *New India* which published it.<sup>31</sup> It created a storm in political circles. Public meetings were organised in various parts of the Presidency to condemn the attitude of the Civil Service.

Gandhiji gave his views on the Reforms Scheme when pressed by Srinivasa Sastri to do so. Gandhiji took no active part in the Congress-League Scheme either. He said that as an “artistic production”, the Reforms Scheme was superior to the Congress-League Scheme and that it deserved a sympathetic handling rather than a summary rejection. But it required to be considerably improved upon. In his own words, “After all, our standard of measurement must be the Congress-League Scheme, crude though it is. I think we should, with all the vehemence and skill that we can command, press for the incorporation into it (the Montford Scheme) the essentials of our own.

“I would therefore, for instance, ask for the rejection of the doctrine of compartments. I very much fear that the dual system in the Provinces will be fatal to the success of the experiment. . . . . We must respectfully press for the Congress-League claim for the immediate granting to Indians of 50 per cent of higher posts in the Civil Service. . . . .”

Gandhiji’s immediate advice was: “Fight unconditionally unto death with Britain for victory and agitate simultaneously, also unto death, if we must, for the reforms we desire”.<sup>32</sup>

### *The Split :*

The Moderates of the Madras Presidency anticipated their

comrades in other parts of India in breaking away from the Congress. With hardly a week to go for the Madras Special Conference to discuss the Reforms proposals, they met separately at a conference in July 1918 which was attended by such prominent leaders as P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer, L.A. Govindaraghava Iyer, T. Rangachari, Yakub Hasan, G.A. Natesan and K.V. Krishnaswamy Iyer. The conference issued on 26 July the famous Madras Manifesto. Couched in a "cautious and mellifluous language" it did point out that the report was influenced by a scepticism as to the capability of the Indians to govern India; and that to keep up the effectiveness of the executive government unimpaired, it had strengthened the position of the executive heads "even beyond the present limits".<sup>33</sup> In making these observations the Moderates had followed those who urged the rejection of the Scheme. The Manifesto then proceeded to say that though the Congress-League Scheme had been "rather lightly" discarded, the Reforms proposals marked a definite stage in the progress towards the goal announced by the Secretary of State on 20 August 1917. Retaining the Scheme as the basis of discussion, the Manifesto suggested *inter-alia* the following:—

In the central sphere, the procedure of certification by the Governor-General should be restricted to cases where interests of peace and order may require it; the control over the customs and tariff should be fully vested in the central legislature; the budget should be voted upon by the legislature except what might be required for the Army and the Navy and the vested interests of the existing services; and the introduction of a larger Indian element in the Executive Council of the Government of India.

In the provincial sphere, the *transferred* subjects should comprise all except law, justice and police; and the transfer of the subjects from the head of *reserved* subjects should be made as a matter of course, after a fixed period, unless it was proved to the satisfaction of the Royal Commission to be appointed under the Scheme that such transfer was undesirable in the public interest. The Manifesto further pointed out that the apportionment of provincial contributions to the imperial expenditure proceeded on wrong principles and perpetrated in the case of Madras a "manifest injustice". It also said that there was no adequate justification for the proposal to appoint members without portfolios from among the higher echelons of the bureaucracy for purposes of consultation and advice—because that would more than neutralise the advantages



to be expected of the presence of the Indian element in the Executive Councils of the Provincial Governments. As for the Mohammadan representation, the Manifesto wanted the proportion fixed in the Congress-League Scheme to be adhered to. The Manifesto concluded stating that the path of wisdom lay not in the rejection of the reforms but in securing considerable modifications.<sup>34</sup> But the modifications proposed undermined the very postulates of the Reforms Scheme. Whether they would be accepted by the Government was anybody's guess.

The Special Session of the Madras Provincial Congress was convened in August 1918 to discuss the Montagu-Chelmsford Report. Led by C. Vijayaraghavachari and Besant, the session reaffirmed its faith in the Congress-League Scheme and declared that nothing less than self-government within the Empire would satisfy India. It condemned the underlying principles of the Scheme such as the compartmental system of government, the division into *reserved* and *transferred* halves, the Grand Committee, the Council of States and the entire reservation of the "sacred power". Curiously, a good many of the signatories to the Madras Moderates' Manifesto which had welcomed the Scheme, were not only present at this Conference but were even parties to the resolutions passed! They were L.A. Govindaraghava Iyer, M. Ramachandra Rao, Yakub Hasan, Khan Bahadur Kuthoos Pacha Saheb, G.A. Natesan and A.S. Krishna Rao. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri did not attend this conference. He was in fact on the horns of a dilemma. He realised that if he abstained from the Madras meeting, there was a possibility of his utterly losing ground in the Madras Province. His footing in public life itself might slip. Passing many days and nights in the greatest "anguish of the soul", he had on a "balance of considerations" ultimately decided to stay away from the Madras Special Congress Session. He was by no means happy about this decision.<sup>35</sup> But he could not help it.

The Muslim League which also held a session at the same time and in the same town adopted the same views as the Congress.

But, at the last session of the Congress held on 3 August 1918 with C. Vijayaraghavachari in the Chair, there arose an acute difference of opinion among the Nationalists themselves. There were two sets of resolutions. One, drafted by Besant and C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer recommended a number of modifications in the Scheme so as to make it acceptable to Indians. The other drafted by Satyamurti and others, condemned and rejected the Scheme

wholesale. The supporters of the second resolution argued vehemently that to accept even the framework of the Scheme would tantamount to sacrificing India's self-respect as a nation.<sup>36</sup> The first resolution was carried.

With the Liberals anxious to accept the Scheme with modifications and the Nationalists holding that the 'mis-shapen' Report was "a monster incapable of being licked into shape", a big and sad split in the Indian National Congress became inevitable.<sup>37</sup> Before the catastrophe took place however every effort was made by those genuinely interested in the unity of the organisation to bring about a *rapprochement* between the Liberals (who were really Moderates) and the Nationalists and to persuade the Liberals to attend the special national level session of the Congress at Bombay scheduled for 30 August 1918. These mediators cared for the unity of the organisation and they wanted all sections of opinion to be associated with any final resolution that might emerge from Bombay. But their efforts proved a wild goose chase as the Moderates were not amenable to reason. They were perhaps afraid that they would unwittingly become a party to a resolution rejecting the Reforms Scheme outright. The lukewarm response of Srinivasa Sastri was typical of the Moderates. Sastri who was the disciple of Gokhale and also his immediate successor at the Servants of India Society sought to abstain from the Bombay Session which implied his dissociation from the Nationalist Movement. He consoled himself that moderation was the motto of his guru Gokhale. He thus sought to justify his secession from the great Movement in terms of his loyalty to Gokhale. Judging from the portents, he was convinced that the Special Congress would pass resolutions which would be the reverse of moderation.<sup>38</sup>

Srinivasa Sastri was advised by his friends in England not to support the holding of an immediate Special Session. If such a one were held, despite all efforts to prevent it, Sastri must get the Moderate leaders assemble in great force and move an amendment supporting the general features of the Scheme and asking for modifications, where necessary, on particular heads. Even if their motion got defeated the Moderates were not to break away from the Congress but to try to regain control over it.<sup>39</sup> It was even feared that Besant and Tilak would manage to command the Congress and get the whole Scheme rejected by the Special Session of the Congress to be held in August.

It would be of interest to know that Srinivasa Sastri received



a telegram from Besant on 8 August 1918, offering him Vice-Chairmanship of the Special Congress. She reckoned that if he accepted it many more Moderates would attend it. But he declined it stating that he had to consult his friends. He was in two minds. He had a long talk with Madan Mohan Malaviya who agreed to come far ahead to meet him, if only he went a little way to meet the latter. This almost tempted Sastri to go into the Congress. He did not want to stay out of the Congress and deprive youngmen all over India of the "sober guidance which we can give". He would sooner be shot dead than stay away from a body which they had built up for 33 years of suffering, suspicion and persecution.<sup>40</sup> Malaviya was sanguine that if a few people of both parties sat round a table for 3 hours, a *concordat* could be reached. The problem, however, was how to get them round the table. Sastri vacillated. If he rejoined the Congress, it would be regarded as a signal for the Liberal party's collapse under the pressure of the "dominant anti-British forces" which would be unfortunate for the fate of the Reforms.<sup>41</sup> The trouble with him was that he belonged to both Madras and Bombay. He felt that the Madras Moderates with whom he had hitherto worked were unduly pessimistic about the acceptance by the Government of the modifications suggested by them. The Moderates of Bombay, Bengal, the United Provinces and the Central Provinces shared Sastri's views. And they all had decided to abstain from the Congress. When such moderate leaders as Dinshaw Wacha, Samarth, Surendranath Banerjee, Ambicacharan Majumdar, Mudholkar, Joshi, Sapru and Chintamani kept away from the Congress, Sastri felt it would be "injurious to my cause for me to appear in Congress as the sole exponent of Moderate views".<sup>42</sup> Sastri was actually in a crisis and felt that whichever course he took there were evils ahead.

The Reforms proposals thus sowed the seeds for a rift in Indian public opinion in general and the Indian National Movement, spearheaded by the Congress in particular. Presuming that the Congress' decision at Bombay would jeopardise the whole Reforms Scheme, the Moderates resolved to abstain themselves from it. Their misgivings about the ultimate outcome of this crucial session were ill-founded. Perhaps as persons genuinely anxious to promote the cause of India, they could have brought about a consensus through the democratic processes of collective deliberation, free discussion and mutual exchange of ideas, if only they had participated in it. The Congress had in its ranks men of sober opinion

who would certainly concentrate their attention on the defects of the Scheme and seek to improve it if that would be possible. At any rate, wrecking the Scheme for the sake of wrecking it was never the purpose of that august body. It behoved the Liberal leaders, who were also men of generous instincts, to attend the Special Congress and strive to give a concrete shape to the volume of criticism that had been levelled against the Scheme. It was only by some sort of united opposition to the defects of the Report that any improvement could be made. The decision arrived at by such united opposition would also give the "stamp of an authoritative endorsement from the only body which is recognised as national". But the Liberals chose to keep away stultifying the authority of the Congress, a national organisation to voice the opinion of a United India. They would rather split the Congress and have a new organization of their own than risk the indefinite postponement of the introduction of the Reforms. They thus acted on expediency rather than on principles. Many were pained at this "great betrayal" by the Moderates who deserted the Congress on imaginary anticipation of an unfavourable reception to the Reforms Scheme.

Thus, a deep split occurred in the ranks of the Congress exactly when it was most necessary for them to be closer than ever before. This trend of events exposed a lack of unity, of understanding and of a sense of give-and-take even among veterans. The split amply vindicated the precaution adopted by Montagu and Chelmsford in granting a semblance of self-government. Had the Moderates stood firm and remained within the Congress, they would have won the day. Of course, they could not have entirely dictated their own terms. But they would have certainly gained an importance such as they never enjoyed since the death of Gokhale. If they had attended the Special Session, some solution acceptable to both schools of thought could have been hammered out and the Reforms would have had a better reception. After such a mature and wide-ranging consideration an undivided Congress might have succeeded in convincing the Viceroy and the Secretary of State of the need for certain amendments. But a vertical split in the Congress about the very acceptability of the Reforms marred everything. Eventually, the Moderates broke up the solid body of the national organisation into two. And the mutual recriminations indulged in by both in the aftermath of the split brought credit to neither of them.

Hardly six months earlier a Moderate leader had confidently



declared it was unlikely that the “old hiatus and the old abyss of distrustful recrimination would open up again for years to come between the two. Never were auguries more favourable or hopeful for co-operation”.<sup>43</sup> But these subsequent happenings proved that “prophesying in practical politics is a profitless game”.

The special session of the Indian National Congress which met at Bombay on 30 August 1918 reaffirmed that nothing short of self-government within the Empire would satisfy the Indian people and that by enabling India to take its rightful place as a full and self-governing nation in the British Commonwealth, the Government would strengthen the connection between Great Britain and India. Tilak said, “we asked for eight annas of responsible government. The Report gives me one anna of responsible government and says it is better than eight annas of responsible government”.<sup>44</sup>

Cutting themselves off from the mainstream of the Congress, the Moderates met at a conference of their own on 1 November 1918 at Bombay. Curiously enough some of the prominent Moderates who originally approved of the Congress-League Scheme spoke against what they called the “ideal of an irresponsible legislature enumerated at Lucknow”.<sup>45</sup> The Moderates called themselves the “friends of evolution” and the “enemies of revolution” and declared their creed to be co-operation with the Government. Presiding over the Conference, Surendranath Banerjee said, “Our guiding principle is to co-operate when we can; criticise when we must. It is not criticise when we can; and co-operate when we must”.<sup>46</sup> Banerjee also stressed that even if the modifications pressed by the Moderates were not accepted, they would still be ready to accept the Scheme as an improvement upon the existing state of things. This speech of Banerjee was the bedrock on which the Moderates based their policy of co-operation with the British Government even during the darkest days of repression against the Nationalist forces.

The rejection of the Scheme by the Congress at the Special Session at Bombay alarmed the authorities in England. Even before the session met, some well-meaning Britishers wrote to their Indian friends in Madras expressing their deep concern about the fate of the Reforms if the Congress condemned it wholesale. They felt it would be ungenerous and unfair for the “left-wing”, by which they meant the Nationalists, to damn the whole Scheme without giving it a fair trial. Although some of its features were “insufficiently liberal”, there was little justification, they argued, for a summary rejection of a Scheme which “in principle has been accepted by a

Conservative peer who has held the high office of Chairman of the Committees of the House of Lords, by the heads of the Civil Service in India, by Montagu's Liberal colleagues, by the two ex-Presidents of the Congress who are now here, and by all the members of the Council of India".<sup>47</sup>

Added to their anxiety was the false propaganda consistently indulged in by Sydenham and the Indo-British Association about the Indian Movement which was gathering momentum particularly after the split in the Congress. This Association warned that the British rule in India was the only guarantee of law and order among the most heterogenous population in the world and that if that were to be weakened, the catastrophe which followed the fall of the Mughal Empire would be repeated.<sup>48</sup> The British well-wishers of India wanted to counter this false propaganda unleashed by Sydenham and his cohorts. They wanted an Indian deputation to visit England and to acquaint the British public with the real state of affairs in India. It was because of the absence of such a deputation that the Association was doing immeasurable harm to the Indian national cause. It was deluding the British public with all kinds of half-truths and untruths about Indian conditions, through literature and press, they said. Under such unfavourable circumstances, any rejection of the Scheme by India would alienate her from the sympathies of the champions of the Indian cause like Bryce, Haldane and others.<sup>49</sup>

The secession of the Moderates from the Congress mainstream was also strongly disapproved by the British friends of India. Their "short-sighted" decision had its repercussions in England as well. The very existence of the British Committee with which the Congress was more or less in accord stood threatened on account of the split. This Committee was carrying on propaganda for the Congress in England. It was already in doldrums after the demise of William Wedderburn who had had a unique knowledge of Indian affairs and strong influence on British public opinion. The secession of the Moderates further jeopardised the Committee's position.<sup>50</sup> Wacha's suggestion that the Committee should be closed down angered its members who felt that its functioning was the most imperative at that critical moment of history to propagate the Indian national cause in England.

The British Committee required a minimum of £2000 for effectively putting across the cause of India to the British public. The members of the Committee who were greatly perturbed over



the developments in the Congress on the Reforms issue, wrote to men like G.A. Natesan in Madras asking them to influence the Congress to furnish funds.\*<sup>51</sup> At the same time they wanted G.A. Natesan to ensure that the Congress refrained from attempting to interfere either with the policy of the Committee or its organ *India* as the Committee was not merely the mouthpiece of the Congress but had a right to its own independent views.<sup>52</sup>

### *The Authors' Despondency:*

Montagu and Chelmsford were themselves nervous about the success of their Reforms proposals. Curzon's attitude was disquieting and the opposition to the Reforms was growing daily in England.

The Report was submitted to His Majesty's Government with the request that it be published. Many operations had to be gone through before the Report became a policy statement of the Government. "All that we ask of His Majesty's Government for the present", stated the authors in Paragraph 351 of their Report "is that they will assent to the publication of the Report". On 1 July 1918, the Cabinet approved of its publication but had not accepted the implementation of the proposals, save by implication in principle. It made no endorsement of the proposals and left the question of appointing Committees to discuss detailed aspects to Curzon, Austen Chamberlain and Montagu. Curzon, member of the War Cabinet\*\* had no compliments for the Report. Nor did he commit himself to any criticism of its proposals. He called it a "confused document difficult to follow and complicated in its recommendations".<sup>53</sup> However, he was in favour of its publication.

The report was published on 2 July 1918. On 4 July Montagu was said to have had a fairly successful interview with Sydenham and the Indo-British Association. However, the subsequent activities of the retired British pro-consul in India belied this claim. For the Sydenham coterie and its press hurled "the fullest abuse" at Mon-

\* The Committee was perhaps never sound financially. V. Krishnaswamy Iyer who was approached for financial aid earlier by the Committee wrote to Wedderburn that he was not in a position to remit more than Rs.1,000 as contribution to the British Committee and that even that amount had to be collected with great effort (V.K. Iyer to Wedderburn, 23 April 1911, *V. Krishnaswamy Iyer Papers*).

\*\* From December 1916 to October 1919, the regular Cabinet was replaced by the miniature War Cabinet with Lloyd George, Bonar Law, Curzon, Milner and Carson as members.

tagu and Chelmsford and also at the Indian National Movement.<sup>54</sup> It must be borne in mind that Sydenham and men of his line of thinking had read even into the Congress-League Scheme a deliberate attempt to substitute a powerful Brahman oligarchy in the place of "benevolent bureaucracy". Expectedly his band was strongly opposed to the inauguration of responsible government in India on the following two principal grounds which were most illogical: (1) since it was the Indian sepoys who fought and bled for England, it was not at all proper for the Indian *intelligentsia* to reap the benefits of the soldiers' service in the shape of political enfranchisement; (2) the introduction of the Reforms would place the voiceless millions of India under the oligarchy of the higher castes who were not interested in the welfare of the down-trodden. The real motive behind this 'unwholesome' affection of the Sydenhams who shed crocodile tears for the poor caste-ridden masses of India was the apprehension that the materialisation of Montagu's proposals would threaten the very existence of the "great White Caste, of British Brahmans whom Great Britain enthroned in India with suzerain powers of life and death over her Brahmans and non-Brahmans".<sup>55</sup> Sydenham had nursed an inveterate distrust of educated Indians.

The very first meeting on 11 July 1918 between Curzon, Chamberlain and Montagu to decide on the appointment of Committees started acrimoniously and Montagu left in the middle of the meeting. Thanks to Chamberlain, who effectively played the mediator, Curzon ultimately agreed for the appointment of two Indian Committees—on the Division of Subjects and on Franchise. Curzon also made a helpful speech in the House of Lords when the Reforms Scheme was debated in October 1918. He also withdrew his earlier opposition to the appointment of the Cabinet Committee to draft the Reforms Bill. Crewe was made Chairman of the Cabinet Committee.

Montagu wanted Curzon to sit on the Cabinet Committee and draft the Bill. But the latter declined owing to pressure of work at the Foreign Office. He was in charge of the Foreign Office as Balfour the then British Prime Minister was away in Paris to attend the Peace Conference held in January 1919. Despite his role in the August announcement Curzon was mercurial in temperament causing untold uneasiness and disquiet to Montagu. Neither did he give his full support to the Scheme nor reveal where exactly he disagreed.



The Indian Reforms Bill was introduced in the House of Commons in May 1919. But it was published in India only three weeks thereafter.<sup>56</sup> Knowing that diarchy would be the one overwhelmingly controversial point Montagu made a lengthy speech in the House stating that he himself was not for it but that he saw no other alternative.<sup>57</sup>

A Joint Select Committee of Parliament—composed of seven members from each House—was set up in June 1919, to inquire into and report on the Indian Reforms Bill. It was in this enquiry that the real struggle lay. But Montagu was still optimistic and hoped that whatever changes were made in the Bill, “we shall be able to secure it from serious whittling down”.<sup>58</sup> The Committee sat from July to October 1919 and heard a large number of witnesses including Besant and those from the Indian deputations. An anxious Montagu wrote, “I could not wish to do anything but to induce the Committee to push on with their work so as to have a reasonable chance of getting some decent sort of Bill through to carry out our pledges. . . .”<sup>59</sup> When the Committee began drafting the Bill in mid-October, Montagu wrote “I am anticipating one of the most unrestful times ever of my experience at the India Office”. It was indeed the most exacting time for Montagu.

The Report of the Committee on the Government of India Bill was presented to the Parliament on 19 November 1919. Though the Parliament was not bound by the Committee’s findings, the Government had, by allowing Montagu to put forward this Bill, indirectly pledged themselves to accept the essential features of it. In November 1918, Lloyd George had explicitly assured in the presence of witnesses that he was determined to carry out the Reforms policy. Burnham, member of the House of Lords, told visiting editors of Indian newspapers that if no better scheme than Montagu’s was forthcoming and none had as yet appeared, opposition to this Bill would be futile.<sup>60</sup> Even in the House of Lords, the opposition to the Reforms proposals spearheaded by Sydenham could not have resisted their passage. Sydenham, an ex-Governor, could not have carried the day when Curzon, an ex-Viceroy, had committed the Government into accepting the Joint Committee’s recommendations on the Bill.

The Joint Committee was content to accept Montagu’s “architecture” as an accurate interpretation of the announcement of 20 August 1917. The Committee’s considered opinion was that the partition of the domain of Provincial government into two fields

with consequent division of responsibilities, was the best way of giving effect to the spirit of the declared policy of the Government. In the selection of subjects to be transferred to Ministers, the guiding principle was that recommended in the Report. The principal subjects *transferred* were Local Self-Government, Education (with certain exceptions), Public Works, Medical and Sanitary Administration, Industries and Excise. *Reserved* subjects included all which were not *transferred*. In the case of subjects where a rigid division could not be effected the decision as to which category they came under rested with the Governor. The general feeling was that the Report of the Joint Committee was more liberal than the Bill itself.<sup>61</sup> It was expected of Indian statesman and politicians to prove their worthiness to reach the goal of responsible government and to demonstrate by their work in future Councils their fitness to receive the next instalment of responsible government, at an early date.

The Committee exercised a "cautious reserve", with the recommendations of the various Commissions. The question of women's franchise was left to be settled by local legislatures. The responsibility of deciding the claims of the non-Brahmans to communal representation was also declined by it and committed to the Government of Madras. The Southborough Committee did not take a rosy view of the prospect of deferring a decision on the controversial question of communal representation in the Presidency of Madras. But it suggested as a last resort that a solution might be found in the provision of plural constituencies and of a certain proportion of seats guaranteed to non-Brahmans. The Madras Government was to find a satisfactory compromise.\*

The Report of the Joint Select Committee was well-received by almost all British politicians who were said to be interested in Indian affairs. When requested by the Indian representatives of *Reuter* and *Associated Press of India* to comment on the Bill as it emerged from the Joint Select Committee, Crewe, Islington, Carmichael, Sinha, Donald Maclean, Michael Saddler, John Rees, Prabhushankar Pattani, C. Sankaran Nair, M. Visveswarayya, Stanley Reed, the Agha Khan, T.J. Bennel, Ramsay Macdonald, Bhupendranath Basu, H.S. Polak, Samarth, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and Annie Besant unanimously stated that the latter's recommendations were a great improvement over the Bill. They also expressed

\* *Supra* Chapter Two.



the hope that educated Indians would welcome it and wholeheartedly co-operate in the successful implementation of the Scheme. Sankaran Nair, Visveswarayya, the Agha Khan, Srinivasa Sastri and Besant felt strongly that the Joint Committee deserved appreciation and not opposition for their work.<sup>62</sup> C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer was making "admirable" speeches on the constitutional side of the Reforms Bill urging that the Bill had got to be worked.<sup>63</sup>

Meanwhile the Government of India had passed their despatch on the Reforms with the recommendations of the local governments. It supported the Joint Committee Report entirely with the exception of the divided purse and the addition of a European member. On 5 December 1919, the House of Commons passed the third reading of the Bill after a two hour debate. The Proposal for Diarchy went through the usual taints without division. It was one of the "most thankful moments" in Montagu's life to see the response of the House of Commons when it put its final endorsement on the Bill.<sup>64</sup> Then it passed through the fire of debate in the House of Lords. Curzon commented during his speech on 12 December that the Reforms Scheme was a daring experiment and that he would not "cavil at the word 'rash' being applied to it".<sup>65</sup> But he acquiesced in its passage. As Montagu rightly observed, if the Committee device had not been adopted the Bill would have been thrown out by the House of Lords without a moment's hesitation.<sup>66</sup>

The Bill was passed into law as the Government of India Act of 1919. Its passage was a plain declaration by the Parliament of its sympathy with the cause of Indian freedom and its "repudiation of the Sydenhams of England and the Dr. Nairs of India". The Declaration of 20 August 1917 was embodied in the Preamble which set forth the objects of the Act of 1919. The Royal Assent to the Act of Parliament based on the Report was given on 23 December 1919 by a Royal Commission, which included Sinha, an Indian member of the Viceroy's Council. It is pertinent to recall here that the British king who had warned against the admission of "a Native" into the Central Executive in a personal communication to the Viceroy in 1910, not only sanctioned the appointment of three Indians into the Viceroy's Executive Council ten years later, but also referred to the Montford Reforms as "the beginning of *Swaraj* within my Empire".<sup>67</sup>

The Act certainly broke a new ground in that it provided for the admission of Indians into the higher services and the commissioned ranks of the Army, besides introducing the principles of responsi-

bility of at least part of the executive to an Indian electorate. For, in the provincial sphere, the Indian Ministers would be responsible not to the British Parliament but through the Indian legislature to an Indian electorate. It thus marked not merely the first step in the direction of complete independence for India but formed the basis for all the subsequent advancement made by government machinery in India however “slow or fast towards full democracy”. Among other things, the Act provided for the establishment of the Public Services Commission whose main function was to protect the services from political influences and to ensure that the candidates were chosen on their own merits and qualifications. It increased the proportion of elected members in the Legislative Council of the Madras Presidency to 77 per cent\* of the total strength. It also abolished indirect election. Except in the case of the University constituencies, franchise was based on a property qualification and residence in the constituency. They were so framed as to bring on the electoral rolls more than five millions and a quarter of voters. Communal representation was accorded to the Mohammadans in accordance with the proportions embodied in the Congress-League pact and a similar concession was extended to Europeans, Anglo-Indians, Sikhs and Indian Christians. A definite proportion of the territorial Hindu constituencies was reserved for the non-Brahmans in Madras.

The Act came into operation in 1920 and remained in force until 1937 in the case of the Provinces.

### *In Retrospect :*

Judging dispassionately from a historical distance of three quarters of a century, one cannot but feel that Montagu's service to India deserved far better recognition than what had actually been accorded to it. His was the first constitutional attempt to respond to the new spirit in India. As such it was radically different from all the Schemes contemplated till then including the Minto-Morley Reforms. Montagu's deep love for India and strong desire to do justice by her people were more than genuine. He spoke of the politically-minded class as being “intellectually our children. They have imbibed ideas which we ourselves have set before them and

\*Bombay and Central Provinces 77 per cent; Bengal and United Provinces 81 per cent; Punjab 76 per cent; Bihar, Orissa and Assam 74 per cent.



we ought to reckon it to their credit. The *Raj* would have been a mechanical and iron thing if the spirit of India had not responded to it".<sup>68</sup>

Even *The Hindu* which made an anatomy of the Scheme in 1918 and showed that it was foredoomed to failure, frankly admitted later, that it misjudged the Scheme. Montagu's proposals proved themselves invulnerable against the criticisms of all political organisations and persons entitled to be heard, and the Scheme ultimately inspired the Government of India Act of 1919. And it is a fact that this Act set British India on the path towards full parliamentary "Home Rule". It did introduce a measure of autonomy in the Provinces and in the Presidency of Madras diarchy worked without break.

Apart from presenting a Scheme to pave the way for self-government Montagu also fought tenaciously for India's membership in the League of Nations. Colonial India was accorded equality in rank with the self-governing Dominions in the British Empire in her external relations. It was indeed India's good fortune that at a most critical period during the first World War, a far seeing statesman like Montagu was placed in charge of its destiny. But Montagu's good deeds turned out to be his undoing. His opponents in the Government who were particularly averse to his liberal outlook in the matter of constitutional reforms for India were just waiting for a pretext to dislodge him. And that opportunity presented itself in the ticklish Turkish policy of Britain. Britain's handling of the defeated Turkey excited strong feeling among the ninety million Muslims of India who resented the disintegration of the last great Mohammadan power and what seemed to them the desecration of the holy places of Islam. The Government of India was bound to represent the dangerous reaction to Lloyd George's policy which cared nothing for the pledges given earlier. Montagu favoured the Indian view when apprised by Viceroy Reading of the dangerous reaction to the British policy on the already disturbed Indian opinion. This irritated his colleagues. When request came to publish Indian protest against the Treaty of Sevres, Montagu permitted the release of the telegram to the Press without consulting the Cabinet. Although the doctrine of collective responsibility of the Cabinet had grown weak under the Coalition Government, this technical error on the part of the Secretary of State was happily exploited by colleagues inimical to him. Curzon grew indignant at this offence against collective responsibility and Lloyd

George demanded forthwith his resignation. That was the end of Montagu's political career. He took the treatment to heart: in a speech made at Cambridge he attacked Curzon and his colleagues violently. While vindicating his action in the House of Commons, he said that that was the unhappiest moment of his life.<sup>69</sup>

Viceroy Reading, a close friend of Montagu, was dreadfully upset over the whole episode. It was his despatch to Montagu that brought about the latter's downfall. It strongly represented the interests of Indian Muslims *vis-a-vis* the treatment meted out to post-war Turkey, and put forward the Government of India's request for a revision of the Treaty of Serves. Reading wrote to Willingdon: "I cannot but feel that I am indirectly the cause, inasmuch as I asked permission to publish the telegram. . . . That they (the happenings in England) have seriously disturbed me will not surprise you, for I was in close communication with Edwin and we kept each other so well-informed of the atmosphere from our respective points of view that the loss to me is very great".<sup>70</sup> Reading was so deeply upset about the episode that for a while he even toyed with the idea of retiring. But he had second thoughts. Bonarlaw who assumed power negotiated and finalised the Treaty of Lausanne which went far to relieve Muslim anxieties.

In the general election of 1922 in England, Montagu's Cambridge constituency turned against him. He was opposed both by a Conservative and a Labour candidate in a three-cornered contest and was left at the bottom of the poll. After this defeat he retired from politics and died in London on 15 November 1924 at the young age of forty five.<sup>71</sup>

Montagu was thus one of the greatest friends India had in England. Unfortunately the Nationalists in India failed to perceive him as such. Perhaps Montagu himself was to blame for this failure. Their treatment of his Scheme might have been different if Montagu had taken them also into confidence during his long sojourn in India.

With the entry of Gandhiji into the political arena, the Congress revised its attitude towards the Reforms Scheme. The Amritsar Congress of December 1919 endorsed the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms Scheme and wanted the nation to give it a fair trial. Unfortunately, in the context of the passage of the Rowlatt Act and its aftermath—the Jalianwallahbagh massacre, the Reforms Scheme fell flat. The Congress boycotted the elections to the very first Council under the new Scheme. Still the Reforms constitution



worked in the Presidency of Madras thanks to the pro-British proclivities of the Justice Party.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Rowlatt Satyagraha

### *Quest for Repression:*

To the British administration in India the National Movement was an eye-sore. They had no qualms about resorting to vile methods in order to quell the same. One such exercise in “savage reprisal” was the passing of the Rowlatt Act—an unparalleled measure in the legislative history of any civilian government. It was enacted by the reactionary Government for no other reason than to show their power to arrest, confine, imprison or otherwise punish persons suspected to be connected with any movement which threatened the security of the state. The Act gave the necessary legal sanction to the oppressive methods which the Government resorted to for stemming the tide of Indian nationalism and to terrorise the people into submission.

Could the legislation kill the rising nationalist spirit in the country? Was it ever put into operation during the troubles that occurred in the wake of its very passage? Where was the need to enact such a redundant law which remained inoperative throughout its life span of three years? The answer is simple. The Act found a place in the Statute Book purely to serve as a threat to counteract the National Movement.

The sporadic acts of violence in the country since the beginning of the century put the Government of India at their wit's end. The fact that the “moderate” and “loyal” Madras Presidency had blazed the trail in acts of terrorism culminating in the murder of Ashe in June 1911 had thoroughly unnerved them. Except for this lone act for which the blame must go squarely to the haughtiness of a small number of British bureaucrats, terrorism was virtually unknown in the Presidency. But to men of Pentland's\* way of thinking any movement for a self-governing India was revolutionary which ought to be crushed. There ensued a ruthless policy

\*Governor of Madras—1912–19.

of repression paving the way for widespread incarceration of the patriotic among Indians.

During the First World War, the Defence of India Act was enacted as an emergency legislation which came in handy to the Government to curb "revolutionary crime". It was designed to enlist the co-operation of everybody in order to put down any violence resorted to by any section of the community in the background of the British war pledge to India. But it was often misused to suppress even constitutional agitation as in the case of the internment of Annie Besant. Sedition continued notwithstanding these measures but posed no hindrance to peaceful administration even during the most troubled times of the War. But the alien government was looking for effective ways to deal mercilessly with any agitation for liberation that might confront them soon after the war when the Defence of India Act would stand lapsed. So, in addition to the Defence of India Act, they also called to their aid, as an anticipatory measure, the infamous Regulation III of 1818 which was an almost forgotten piece of legislation. The first provided for the internment of dangerously seditious persons, revolutionaries and anarchists, the second, a special means of bringing them to a speedy trial. This easy recourse to unpopular laws clearly indicated that the administration was diffident and sceptical of the effectiveness of normal laws in dealing with extraordinary situations.

These coercive measures met with fierce opposition from Indians of all shades of public opinion. They became the subject of vituperation everywhere. Freedom fighters, who were patriotic to the core and who loved law and order, had an abiding faith in the efficacy and value of constitutional agitation. They themselves condemned terrorism from whatever quarter it emanated and were anxious to nip in the bud such methods of agitation for *Swaraj*. But subterranean activities were confined to a very negligible section of youngmen who posed no problem of such magnitude to public peace as the official reactionaries reported. There was no explosive situation building up in the country and there was no disruption of normal life anywhere. Even granting there were excesses of violence the ordinary law of the land had enough provisions to deal with any unexpected emergency. Section 108 of the Criminal Procedure Code, the provisions of the Penal Code and the Act of 1909 provided the Government with all the powers they required to deal firmly with anti-social elements. A strong government like that of



India certainly did not stand in need of such drastic laws. The public spirited men therefore spoke on the platforms and wrote in the press fearlessly and consistently that the government should abrogate all the special powers invoked to deal with a situation which did not in reality exist. In case of real political instability, they pledged joint efforts to co-operate with the Government in any measure, punitive or preventive, aimed at anti-social elements out to exploit the situation to their own end. But they warned that such measures should be based on the rule of law and should be so enforced as to inspire confidence in the people about the fair and objective nature of the proceedings.

It was expected that the British Government in India, which was guided by the principle of rule of law, would respond to these demands and remove all justifiable causes for this popular agitation. But they acted vindictively and sought to give their policy of repression the force of law. It was made to appear that the situation in the country was on the boil with widespread rioting by terrorists against the white regime necessitating the appointment of an investigating committee. The task of the Government of India was made simpler by the Government of Bengal whose Governor\* announced that the repressive policy of the Government was based upon complete knowledge supported by evidence of the extent and ramifications of a revolutionary movement. The ordinary legal procedure, it was contended, had failed miserably in dealing with persistent, unscrupulous and ruthless offenders and hence the Government had to seek recourse to extraordinary measures of repression. It was however left to Governor Ronaldshay\*\* to request the Government of India to appoint a strong committee of Indians and Europeans with a judge of the High Court of England as its head and to pronounce whether there was any justification or not for the action that was being taken. The Government of India assented to this request and the appointment in 1918 of what became known as the Rowlatt Committee consisting of "eminent" judges was the result. In the task of Government, as the well-known British Parliamentarian Burke advised,

\* Carmichael, Sir Thomas David Gibson (1859–1926) Governor of Madras from November, 1911 to April, 1912, became the first Governor of Bengal as re-constituted by the King-Emperor's announcement at the Delhi *Darbar*. He left India in 1917.

\*\* Ronaldshay, Dundas Lawrence, First Marquis of Zetland (1844–1929) was Governor of Bengal from 1917–1922.

conciliation should precede coercion and only when the former failed, the latter should be resorted to. But Chelmsford's Government had perverted Burke's sound order with disastrous consequences both for the British Government and the people of India. The appointment of the Sedition Committee came in at a most inopportune moment: it blasted all the hopes about a fair trial for the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. Though the British authorities themselves had wanted the public to consider the proposals earnestly, calmly and dispassionately, their resort to repressive measures ruined the prevailing peaceful political climate. They refused to see that reforms and repression could not go together. Obviously the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms Scheme intended to grant a measure of self-government to India and the Rowlatt legislation purporting to put down terrorist activities in India were taking shape side by side. The authorities did not seem to realise that the calm Indian atmosphere which they considered to be indispensable at the time of Montagu's visit to India for consulting the opinion of leaders was a thousand times more essential when the Government was to face the first operative step to put India on the road to self-government.

#### *The Sedition Committee:*

Disregarding warnings from men of consequence, the Sedition Committee was appointed on 10 December 1917 exactly a month after Montagu arrived in India to prepare his Reforms Scheme. It was named after Sidney Rowlatt of the King's Bench Division of His majesty's High Court of Justice, who headed it. Being unacquainted with the conditions in India, his knowledge of Indian law and its relations to the revolutionary crimes was not first-hand. The other four members—two Indians and two Englishmen—who were all creatures of the Indian bureaucracy were Chief Justice Basil Scott of the Bombay High Court, Justice C. V. Kumaraswamy Sastri\* of Madras High Court, Verney Lovett, Member of the Board of Revenue of the United Provinces and Provash Chandra Mitter, Vakil of Calcutta High Court and Additional Member of the Bengal Legislative Council. J. D. Hodge of the Indian Civil Service was appointed Secretary to the Committee.

\* His membership on the Sedition Committee earned him considerable unpopularity. He was nicknamed "Rowlatt Sastri", (M. P. Sivagnanam, Vidudalaipporil Tamizhagam; Vol. I; p. 383).



The task of the Rowlatt Committee was to investigate and report on the extent and depth of the criminal conspiracies connected with the revolutionary movement in India and to advise on the legislation that would be necessary to enable the government to deal with them effectively.

All the 46 sittings\* of the committee were held *in camera*; it had nobody to present any view contrary to its own.<sup>1</sup> The evidence placed before the committee was not furnished to the members of the Indian Legislative Council: the latter were simply asked to accept its findings as correct. The evidence was not subjected to cross-examination or to any of the usual tests so necessary to sift truth from untruth.<sup>2</sup> Such indifferent sifting of available evidence was the result of two factors: Preparation of the ground for the committee by two members of the Indian Civil Service, and the supply of records by the police and by “interested holiday makers of V. Chirol’s stamp” who delighted in depicting India in the darkest colours.<sup>3</sup>

The Report of the committee comprised 17 chapters running to 152 foolscap pages plus two annexures containing summaries of sedition cases. It was presented to the Government on 15 April 1918. It must be recalled here that the Montagu-Chelmsford Report was submitted to the Government just a week later. The Rowlatt Report was published on 19 July 1918, that is, just eleven days after the publication of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report thereby making a mockery of the proposed grant of self-government. The Government of India under Chelmsford could not have chosen a more inopportune moment to introduce this inequitable piece of legislation. It only deepened the discontent and dissatisfaction over the Reforms proposals. The Rowlatt Act totally detracted the Indian intelligentsia from the Reforms proposals.

The findings of the Rowlatt Committee were unanimous. It threw “lurid light” on the nature and extent of the revolutionary conspiracy in India admitting of course that it was confined to a small section of youngmen. It dealt lengthily with the sedition movement and its ramifications in India and elsewhere. It listed 311 offences from 1906 upto the date of the submission of the Report. Of the 1038 persons implicated in them, only 64 were convicted. It drew attention to the secret plots pursued by the activists

\* 44 were held at Calcutta and 2 at Lahore.

who had links with and received material assistance from the King's enemies to start violent activities in India.

It contained a fascinating account of the German plots, discovery of documents on Russian revolutionary methods of Turkish connection, the *Ghadr* Revolutionary party in California and much else. The emphasis was on German plots in India — one full chapter being devoted to it. It referred to instances of Germany employing Indians to produce anti-British literature and to indulge in a conspiracy fostered and financed by the Germans with a view to causing an uprising in India. The Committee maintained that ultimately Germany wanted to wrest India from the Empire.

The outstanding feature of the Report was its “completest vindication” possible of the action of the Government of India in conjunction with the local governments in resorting to the draconian measures to put down the “revolutionary movement” in India.<sup>4</sup> Since abnormal situations required abnormal measures, the Committee paid glowing tributes to the Government for its marvellous achievements in crushing plots and disturbances in the manner they did. The Committee stated that the Government was fully justified in doing so in the shocking context of the failure of the forces of law and order working through the ordinary channels. Since nothing much could come out of punitive measures either, the committee proposed to endow the Government with the power to make special legislation of both an emergency and a permanent character. That would enable the Government to cope effectively with the disorder by drastically curtailing the liberty of the people. Such recommendations which were born out of an inadequate and imperfect understanding of the political upheaval in India were fraught with dangerous consequences. As stated earlier, the Committee's report on the revolutionary crimes as well as its recommendations to subdue them were based on the material supplied by the Government of India. In vain, Montagu warned Justice Rowlatt when the latter called on him at Bombay against the plan of the Government of India which believed in administration by “internment and police”<sup>5</sup>.

#### *Committee's findings: Madras Presidency:*

As far as revolutionary crimes in the Presidency of Madras were concerned, one could sense the perturbation of the committee over this non-violent region having begun to follow the violent ways of



other provinces.<sup>6</sup> To review its findings about the Presidency: In Madras there was no indigenous revolutionary movement. It was a virgin soil and as such appealed to the revolutionaries of Bengal and Bombay. The four methods of the revolutionaries—circulation of seditious literature, corruption of young students for political ends, incitements to violence and murder and invocation of foreign aid—were illustrated most clearly in this presidency. Its part in all these conspiracies though small was enough to sully its clean record of law and order and reputation for loyalty. The outbreak of unrest and crime between 1907 and 1910 which stained the fair name of the Presidency must be attributed to the deliberate doings in Madras in 1907 of Bipin Chandra Pal and of the revolutionaries plotting in Pondicherry and in Paris. Pal began his “evil work” with a series of lectures on the congenial themes of *Swaraj*, *Swadeshi* and the boycott. He made a tour through the East Coast cities in April 1907 and one of the first fruits of his labours was the strike of the students of the Government college at Rajahmundry in April 1907 immediately following his visit there. In his speech at Madras on 2 May, 1907, Pal declared that the strength of the new revolutionary movement lay in recognising that the British administration was based on *maya* or illusion. He paid several visits to Madras to instil courage into drooping hearts and to appoint agents to carry on the work of propaganda. One of his agents in Madras publicly advocated the need for youngmen to go abroad, learn the techniques of manufacturing and wielding bombs and other destructive weapons, return to India and annihilate 108 Whites on every *amavasya* (New moon).<sup>7</sup> He painted a bright prospect for the whole nation in this revolutionary direction. Krishnaswamy, another agent of Pal, urged in a public meeting in Karur (Coimbatore District) that the guns of the native regiment should be wrested for shooting down white faces<sup>8</sup> on the altar of *Swaraj*. In Bezwada, a Telugu Newspaper titled *Swaraj* was revived on the occasion of the release of Pal. The paper carried a virulent article on the arrest of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai which concluded: “Hello! *Feringhi*! cruel tiger! . . . the arbitrary *Feringhi* rule is drying up at the mere breeze of the development of Indian Nationality”<sup>9</sup> An outburst of seditious activity ensued in the wake of Pal’s visit and culminated in the serious riot of Tinnevely in March 1908 when all public buildings with their furniture and records were destroyed. Tamil newspapers were then enlisted for the propagation of seditious activities and the movement was directed from

Pondicherry, a French enclave in the region, in conjunction with revolutionary agents like Madame Cama in Paris. It was the loyal co-operation of the Government of French-India with that of Madras which helped to “excise this festering sore of sedition and anarchy in Madras”.<sup>10</sup>

Nilakanta Brahmachari in collusion with Sankara Krishna Iyer hatched a conspiracy in the Presidency against the British Government in September 1908. He persuaded many persons in the Presidency to take a “blood oath” for securing Swaraj. The killing of the *Feringhi* was openly urged. Early in December 1910, V.V.S. Iyer who was associated with Madame Cama and other plotters while in Paris arrived in Pondicherry and offered training to young Indians in revolver shooting. Sankara Krishna Iyer’s brother-in-law, Vanchi Iyer, a clerk in the Travancore Forest Department who came to Pondicherry in January 1911 on three months’ leave, received instructions from V.V.S. Iyer in revolver practice. On 17 June 1911, Ashe, the District Collector of Tinnevely, was shot dead in a railway carriage at Maniachi junction and the crime was applauded in all “revolutionary sheets”. On Vanchi Iyer’s body was found a letter written in Tamil that every Indian was out to drive the British away and to restore *Swarajya* and *Sanatana Dharma* in India. The letter also made it known that three thousand Madrasis had vowed to kill George V when this “*Mlechha*, who ate the flesh of cows” would be crowned in India. An indication of this crime could be found in an article in the April number of the *Bande Mataram* of Madame Cama published in Paris. In an article that appeared after the murder of Ashe, Madame Cama showed that the crime was in accordance with the teachings of the *Bhagvad Gita*. She stated: “when the gilded slaves from Hindustan were parading the streets of London as performers in the royal circus and were prostrating themselves like so many cows of the King of England, two young and brave countrymen of ours proved by their daring deeds at Tinnevely and at Mymensingh\* that Hindustan is not sleeping”. This article and the letter found on the dead-body of Vanchi Iyer “seem to show that the murder (of Ashe) was designed to take place on the day of the royal coronation” of George V, said the Report.<sup>11</sup>

\* Sub-Inspector Rajkumar Ray was murdered on 19 June 1911 at Mymensingh (Bengal).



The Report was expectedly silent over the harsh treatment meted out by the Government to V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Subrahmanya Siva and Padmanabha Iyengar. These patriots were accused of having excited disaffection towards the Government by their speeches in Tuticorin and by organising processions to celebrate the release of Bipin C. Pal. The killing of Ashe, an arch-imperialist two years later was but an echo of the aforesaid autocratic savagery on the part of the British bureaucrats in Tinnevely under the “benign” captaincy of Ashe.\*

The revolutionary propaganda was imputed by the Committee also to Brahman influence.\*\* This supposition was based on the theory that the Brahman, having lost under British *Raj* his place of trust and responsibility he once enjoyed under indigenous administrations, began to propagate revolutionary ideas to end the *Raj*. In support of this theory the following statement was made in the very introduction to the Report: “Republican or Parliamentary forms of Government as at present understood were neither desired nor known in India till after the establishment of the British rule”, as there prevailed only absolute monarchy—the King being assisted by a body of councillors, chief of whom were Brahmans. There could not be a more telling commentary on the justice of the caste war then going on in the Presidency. Expressing its strong disapproval of such a “perilous peep” into ancient Indian polity which had become the “stock-in-trade of vilifiers and traducers of India”, *The Hindu* observed with pain that the Report of the Sedition Committee “begins with this perversion of truth and our regret is all the greater because this is tacitly accepted by the two Indian Members of the Committee”.

That part of the Report of the Committee which chronicled the untoward occurrences in Madras and other Presidencies, though one-sided, contained facts which no one could dispute. It spoke of revolutionary acts of a criminal character which had to be put down and of rampant anti-British feeling in certain parts of the Presidency which had to be stamped out if there was to be peace in the

\**Supra* Chapter One..

\*\*It is ironical that the Brahmans were branded in the course of our more recent social history as lackeys of British imperialism while they had been suspect in the eyes of the British not without evidence as revolutionary enemies of the *Raj* in the early years of this century.

land. All the Indian Members of the Imperial Council accepted these statements. But they demurred at the accuracy of the following observations: that the ordinary governmental machinery was so weak as to have broken down; and that the judiciary must be displaced by the executive in order to combat the evil. They affirmed that the remedy was worse than the malady against which they were fighting. The measures recommended in the Report were such as could be operative only under conditions of emergency when a threat to the security of a nation was clear and imminent. The members also pointed out that the Report failed to draw the attention of the Government sufficiently clearly to the dangers the public would be exposed to by tribunals acting upon the one-sided statements placed before them by the Police. They argued that it constituted a threat to the exercise of their basic rights by the citizens.<sup>12</sup>

All those who respected human dignity and valued freedom were indignant at the findings of the Report. The Europeans and the loyalists in the Presidency welcomed them. To them the Montford Report was "gall and wormwood"; and it was "poison" to which the Rowlatt Report was an antidote. The Reforms Scheme, in their opinion, deliberately passed lightly over the question of seditious and revolutionary movements in India. The *Madras Mail* went so far as to recommend that "a digest of the findings of the committee, if pre fixed to the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms proposals, would enable the British man-in-street to obtain a juster view of the essentials of the situation".<sup>13</sup>

*The debate and the Act: B.N. Sarma's gesture:*

The contempt of the Liberal Secretary of State for the Rowlatt Report which ran counter to all ideas of western justice could never be exaggerated. Supporting the agitation for self-government he once said that it would be "monstrous to forbid a man to make outside the same speech he had made inside the legislature or to prevent an official from taking part in politics outside while he could be a politician inside the Council using his vote and influence in political matters and sitting on the Cabinet, that is, the Executive Council".<sup>14</sup> He expressed his total disapproval of the Report which emasculated the elementary rights of the citizens and bluntly told Chelmsford that he found it "most repugnant" when it was submitted to him. He wrote: "I hate to give the Pentlands of this world or the O'Dwyers, the chance of locking up a man without trial".<sup>15</sup>



On 6 February 1919, the Home Member introduced the Criminal Law (Emergency Powers) Bill\* and moved that it should be referred to a Select Committee of fifteen members of the Indian Legislative Council. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri was one of them.<sup>16</sup> The Bill was debated for two days at the end of which the Home Member's motion was carried. During these debates, Srinivasa Sastri delivered one of his most memorable speeches on 7 February when he rightly pointed out that a bad law once passed was not always used against the bad. Under the policy of suspicion which the Government proposed to launch, even the most trusted friends of government were not safe.<sup>17</sup> It was an indictment against the whole nation. The Act had cast an aspersion on the loyalty of 300 million Indians. The history of legislation whether social or political was replete with instances of miscarriage of best intentions. During the spells of repression in 1908, Sastri went round the Presidency organising district Congress Committees. But there was "such a lowering of public spirit, such a blight had fallen on the political world, the Criminal Investigation Department had been so active, the repressive policy of the Government had been so manifest, it was impossible in many places to get people to come together to a public meeting".<sup>18</sup>

It is said that in the literature of our freedom struggle nothing could be more cogent, forceful or unequivocal than Sastri's denunciation of the Rowlatt Bill in his speech of 7 February 1919. Couched in a superb language, it was noted for its incisive reasoning, convincing arguments and biting sarcasm. Referring to the Law Member's remark that some of those who opposed the Bill were indulging in threats of agitations, Sastri concluded his historic speech as follows: "... if our appeals fall flat, if the Bill goes through, I do not believe there is anyone here who would be doing his duty if he did not join the agitation. That is not a threat ... I have yet borne no part in the agitation but, if everything goes wrong, if we are face to face with this legislation, how it is possible for me with the views that I hold to abstain from agitation, I for one cannot say".<sup>19</sup>

During these debates all the Indian members with one voice appealed to the Government to drop the Bill or at least defer it "till six months have elapsed after the expiry of the term of office

\* Bill No. II. There were two Bills. The consideration of Bill No. I (Indian Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill) was postponed.

of this legislative council". On 6 February, the non-official members arrived at a consensus to oppose the introduction of the Bills and to resign their seats in the Legislature if their motion was defeated. B.N. Sarma had actually received a "mandate" from his constituency, a telegram from 13 members of the Madras Legislative Council, and innumerable wires from almost every district headquarters, from almost every town in the Madras Presidency, asking him to scrap the Bill then and there.<sup>20</sup> The facts and figures which Sarma marshalled in support of his speeches throughout the discussions on the Rowlatt Bills proved very inconvenient and embarrassing to the official spokesmen. But all the amendments of the non-official members were negated by the official members. Neither the nominated members nor the Zamindari members, nor the lawyer members blessed the Bill. Yet the Lawyer member George Lowndes proudly said "we must carry this legislation through because we are satisfied that it is right".<sup>21</sup>

Gandhiji attended one of these debates of the Central Legislature, the only one he ever attended. Srinivasa Sastri, Banerjee, Jinnah and many others spoke against the Bill on that day. From the gallery Gandhiji saw the Viceroy listen to the eloquent speech of Sastri. But it was all a farce. For "neither the earnestness of Sastri, nor the eloquence of Banerji, nor the merciless logic of Jinnah was of any avail".<sup>22</sup> The passage of the Bill was a foregone conclusion in a Council with a "built-in majority of officials".<sup>23</sup>

It was stated by the official members that sanction was obtained from Montagu, the Secretary of State, for the introduction of "some Bill on the lines of the Rowlatt recommendations" without submitting to him the actual text of the Bill. The Bill went beyond those recommended by the Sedition Committee in one very essential particular: it was the addition of sections. 124A and 153A to the schedule. The members were not told whether the sanction of the Secretary of State was obtained to this addition. The correspondence between the Government of India and the Secretary of State in regard to this Bill was kept back from members of the Indian Legislative Council on the ground that it was confidential.<sup>24</sup>

In the meantime, the Select Committee met to scrutinise the Bill. The non-official members on the Committee who participated in its "farcical deliberations" hardly had a say in the matter. They only knew too well that the Bill would be passed into law by the official majority under the mandate of the Executive Government. By a fiat of his ruling, the chairman of the Select Committee pre-



vented it from scrutinising the principles of the Bill and considering the question of the competence of the Indian Legislature to enact this law. The Governor General, as President of the Indian Legislature had ruled that a member of a committee wishing to put in a dissenting minute, could do so only when he had affixed his signature to the Report. Thus no member of the Select Committee could invalidate its report by refusing to sign.<sup>25</sup>

On 12 March when the report of the Select Committee came up for discussion in the Indian Legislative Council, the non-official members did everything in their power to move the Government to refer the Bill to Local Governments, High Courts and public bodies for comments. But their efforts did not fructify.<sup>26</sup> V.J. Patel's plea to afford the public an opportunity to express their opinions on the Sedition Bill not as introduced, not as amended by the Select Committee (whose amendments related to non-essential matters) but as amended by the Council was rejected by the official majority.<sup>27</sup> Amendments of the non-official members suggesting the deletion of certain parts of the Bill were also lost. Even the amendments to render the Bill less offensive in some important particulars were mercilessly defeated.<sup>28</sup>

It may be recalled that on 6 February 1919, all the non-official Members decided to withdraw from the Indian Legislature if their motion for deferring consideration of the Bill got defeated by the Government by virtue of its official majority. But it was the misfortune of India that almost immediately after this decision most of the Moderates "succumbed to official endeavours to break the solidarity of the opposition".<sup>29</sup> When the Home Member praised the Moderate members for their "conciliatory" attitude in his concluding remarks on the debate on 7 February, a Moderate member promptly asked if the Government could make the measure temporary. Perhaps he did not realise that thereby he committed himself to supporting the law as a temporary measure. Reacting to this statement strongly, Narayanan Chandavarkar wrote, "The Indian Members of the Council owe it to themselves and to the peoples, therefore, that they should refuse to support such an exceptional case of legislation unless the general will of the country, of which they are exponents, is behind them. That is the test for them and they are entitled on the grounds of recognised constitutional principles to urge that the constitution of the Government should be popularised first in the direction of responsible government before they can share the responsibility of such laws with the

executive in a time of peace".<sup>30</sup> When V.J. Patel urged him to organise all the non-official members to boycott the Council on 12 March and the following days, Sastri refused to countenance the idea.

After discussing the Bill for several wearisome days at wearisome length it fell to the lot of the hapless non-official Indian Members to witness its conversion into Law on 18 March 1919. B.N. Sarma's last efforts to stay the passage of the Bill had no effect on the officialdom. The official spokesmen who were generous enough to admit that it was a drastic and extravagant measure lamented that there was no other remedy which would satisfactorily meet the evil. One of the fatuous arguments of the Home Member in defence of the measure was that no government could remain "naked and defenceless when the burglar had made his appearance".<sup>31</sup>

In the teeth of the popular opposition outside the Council and the united, strenuous and desperate appeal of the non-official Indian members inside the Council not to enact this pernicious law, the Bill was passed by an official majority. It was named the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act, 1919 popularly called the Rowlatt Act. The Act was to be in force for three years. It was passed by 35 votes for, 20 against. All the Indian Members, save C. Sankaran Nair, voted against the motion.

Immediately after its passage, B.N. Sarma resigned his office as member of the Imperial Legislative Council. Genuine and industrious that he was in the public cause, he felt that a government which passed such a draconian law in defiance of public opinion forfeited all claims to co-operation or even obedience to the ordinary law.

The Madras Presidency could be legitimately proud of this sublime act of patriotism, moral courage and self-respect on the part of its representative. Extolling his gesture as the "first practical illustration of the principle of Satyagraha", *The Hindu* expressed the hope that there would be other self-respecting members who would follow his excellent example, thus showing a method of passive resistance to the obnoxious law which must have far-reaching effects\*.<sup>32</sup>

The Rowlatt Act was mainly in three parts. It bestowed on the Government the power (1) to set-up special courts consisting of

\*Later Sarma withdrew his resignation.



three High Court Judges for specified offences; (2) to direct execution of bond for good behaviour; internment within city reporting at police station; and abstention from specific acts; and (3) to arrest without warrants, preventive detention and search of places. The first part set at nought rules of evidence and the justice of the jury system. The second part substituted the rule of the executive for that of the judiciary and placed the liberty of the subject at the sweet will and pleasure of the executive. The last part denied the right to appeal from the decision of the special courts which would meet *in camera* and entertain evidence not admissible under the Indian Evidence Act.

The Provincial Governments could order any person on suspicion, "to furnish security or to notify his residence, or to reside in a particular area or to abstain from any specified act, or finally to report himself to the police". The Provincial Government could also search a place and arrest a suspected person without warrant and keep him in confinement, "in such places and under such conditions and restrictions as it may specify".

The Government of India got conferred on it all these powers supplanting and abrogating the ordinary judicial courts, forms and procedures, in a time of peace. Of course William Vincent assured the House that if ever the Act was put into force, it would never be used against the innocent and the honest.<sup>33</sup> Indeed an "idyllic picture" tended to camouflage the reign of terror that was sought to be brought about.

### *The first Satyagraha:*

The Madras Presidency was the epicentre of the first Satyagraha Movement against the British in India. It was significant that at the time of the passage of this "Black Bill", Gandhiji was in Madras despite his illness. He arrived in Madras on 17 March at the invitation of Kasturiranga Iyengar in order to expound the significance of the Satyagraha pledge to its people. As per the pledge the Satyagrahis should refuse civilly to obey the Rowlatt law and "faithfully follow truth and refrain from violence to life, person or property". It was Madras' unique good fortune that the idea of Satyagraha took proper shape there. Actually even before the Bill passed into law, Gandhiji had pledged himself to offer Satyagraha against it. Although he was certain that the weapons of the Satyagrahi were non-violence, truth and self-suffering, Gandhiji had as yet no

clear-cut idea about the mode of launching this novel struggle. And he needed a spark. The solution came to him in Madras on the night of 18 March in a dream, in that twilight condition between sleep and consciousness. The next morning he unfolded his plan to Rajaji whose guest he was\*. He said that the people should be summoned to observe a general *hartal* from one end of the country to the other. This strike would differ from other strikes in that it would be accompanied by fasting and prayer to symbolise the humiliation the people were undergoing. For twenty four hours the whole of India would fast and all the machinery of Government and all trade would come to a standstill. The *hartal* would be observed on 6 April, the second Sunday after the Viceroy gave his assent to the Rowlatt Bill. Gandhiji also said that he was "fairly sure" of response to his appeal from Madras, Bombay, Bihar and Sind.<sup>34</sup> In the words of a biographer of Gandhiji, this new weapon "was a stupendous conception, for such a *hartal* had never previously been undertaken, or even contemplated. . . . A voice speaking in a dream sometimes had prodigious power behind it, appearing to come with absolute authority. Vast pent-up forces are released, taking the shape of urgent and impreious commands. . . ."<sup>35</sup>

Kasturiranga Iyengar had a major share in preparing the ground in the Madras Presidency for Gandhiji's mission. The public meeting at the Marina Beach on 18 March which was attended by about one lakh of people was addressed by Gandhiji with Iyengar in the chair. The other celebrities who spoke at the meeting were Sarojini Naidu, C. Vijayaraghavachari, S. Satyamurti, T. V. Gopalswami Mudaliar and S. S. Bharati. An appeal was made to the Viceroy to withhold assent to the Act, which cast an undeserved slur on the loyalty of 300 millions of Indians.<sup>36</sup>

Gandhiji then made a tour of the Presidency, particularly the Tamil districts covering in all a period of about two weeks of his most precious time. He visited Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Madurai, Tuticorin and Nagapatam and addressed huge audiences notwithstanding his unsatisfactory health. He took pains to explain to them the importance of the Satyagraha pledge, the laws whose breach

\* Rajaji had only then moved to Madras from Salem where he had a roaring practice as a lawyer. He was also doing commendable work as Chairman of the Salem Municipal Council. When Gandhiji did not relish the idea of putting up with a practising lawyer, Mahadev Desai assured him that Rajaji was a "precious find" of Kasturiranga Iyengar, that he was an ideal host for Gandhiji and that he would throw away his practice in a moment at Gandhiji's word.



was contemplated by the pledge and the real spirit of a satyagrahi. He left Madras for Bezwada on 30 March.

The Viceroy who could always depend on the loyalists' support in encountering public opposition gave his assent to the Act whereby it became a law of the land. Gandhiji decided to launch the Satyagraha Movement against this obnoxious law which reprobated even association with a man once convicted of sedition. Gandhiji also feared that this law would be used to terrorise the sepoys when they returned home with their hearts bitter with the ill-treatment and humiliation they had to endure during the war.<sup>37</sup>

Past experience had proved the futility of such measures as speeches in legislatures, manifestoes, cables to England at prohibitive costs and threats of agitation against *fait accompli*. Satyagraha was the only available weapon to the despairing Nationalists. Gandhiji said, it was the "only way, it seems to me, to stop terrorism". And liberty-loving Indians were prepared to disobey the law and submit to the penalties for its breach.

When the Presidency was well-set to embark on the Satyagraha Movement, there was a division of opinion on the expediency of launching it at a time when the constitutional reforms were in the offing. The Moderate section considered "passive resistance"\* unwise, inexpedient and injurious to the best interests of the country. They issued a Manifesto against what they continued to call "passive resistance" on 17 March 1919—the day when Gandhiji arrived in Madras.<sup>38</sup> Their main objection was that it would hinder the Reform Proposals and possibly the introduction of the Bill in May 1919.

Their Manifesto said that the only course immediately open to its authors was to secure, if possible, the disallowance of the Act by the Crown. They sent the following cable to the Secretary of State for India: "Rowlatt legislation hurried through Council without adequate opportunity for public criticism and against the unanimous opposition of Indian members. No need for legislation. Present powers ample for all unexpected emergencies. Country greatly agitated. Atmosphere created prejudicial to successful working of reforms and to effective co-operation between people and government"<sup>39</sup>. But the Manifesto was construed in many

\* It was "non-violent" resistance and not "passive" resistance. The latter conceived as a weapon of the weak did not exclude the use of physical force or violence for the purpose of gaining one's end.

quarters in the Presidency as a sad development which amounted to discrediting in advance Gandhiji who had decided to use his weapon of Satyagraha for the first time in India for a major cause. Some of the views expressed by Srinivasa Sastri now ran counter to his own statements made in the Council on 7 February 1919. Soon after signing the aforesaid Manifesto, he affirmed that the Rowlatt Act had its sting half-removed by its life being limited to three years and to offences which were anarchical and revolutionary. He also said "you could not disobey a law which does not touch the honest citizen". When Besant told him that the law would apply to ordinary political activity also, he charged her with being unduly harsh to the Government. He said the "straight, unbending and adorable but impractical" Gandhiji had taken an "absurdly sentimental" view of the legislation which he had not understood!<sup>40</sup> Sastri and party believed that it would be a dangerous precedent to yield to Gandhiji's threat of Satyagraha.

*The Hindu* remarked "Manifestoes may be useful raw material for political window-dressing, but it is not in them to make or mar a movement".<sup>41</sup> The paper was highly critical of the Madras Moderates for forming the Liberal League. The *Independent* called them mischief mongers. The Moderates much regretted the absence of a good moderate organ among the Madras dailies. But some of them doubted whether a journalistic venture on their part would meet with any degree of success.<sup>42</sup> The signatories to the Manifesto would go on with their political agitation as if the Rowlatt Act did not exist. The Moderates could see no half way house between Gandhiji's plan of Satyagraha and the orthodox constitutional methods. To them the Satyagraha Movement was fraught with dangers. They could not believe that people had suddenly become so spiritual as to suffer in the manner Gandhiji would have them suffer. Delhi had demonstrated the futility of Gandhiji's expectations.\*<sup>43</sup> Lahore did very nearly the same. To them, Satyagraha seemed to be only a veneer cover for fanning the discontent of the people into flaming violence.<sup>44</sup> Its unsuitability was recognised by the very fact that they had to "artificially disobey" other laws also in order to get into open conflict with the authorities. Otherwise,

\* March 30 was fixed to be a day of hartal, a day of fasting and penance and meetings all over India. The date was changed to 6 April but it was not notified in Delhi in time. So procession and *hartal* were held in Delhi when the police shot at peaceful satyagrahis.



they might passively resist for years without ever coming into the path of the police.<sup>45</sup>

The Moderates of the Madras Presidency organised themselves into an association—the Liberal League—which was inaugurated on 5 April 1919. At a meeting held a fortnight later, the League passed three resolutions: (1) condemning the mob violence and imploring Gandhiji to abandon “passive resistance”; (2) condemning the police firing on the mob in Delhi asking for independent inquiry and deprecating the Government of India’s alarmist action regarding Punjab in proclaiming a state of rebellion and sanctioning court martial; and (3) protesting against the whittling down of reforms. The Moderates were determined not to allow Gandhiji even unwittingly to “injure” India.

On 3 April Gandhiji wired to Kasturiranga Iyengar from Bombay to say: “. . . I have not a shadow of doubt that by remaining true to our pledge we shall not only secure withdrawal (of) Rowlatt legislation but we shall kill (the) spirit of terrorism lying behind. . . .”<sup>46</sup> The entire Presidency of Madras responded to that clarion call falsifying the forebodings of some who were sceptical of its success in the Presidency. Madras took the plunge first and organised a show of force on a scale never before witnessed when even the “Bengal Extremists were devising decent excuses for not pledging themselves to Gandhiji’s plan of passive resistance to the Rowlatt Bills”.<sup>47</sup> The unprecedented gathering in Madras on its first *Hartal* on 6 April amply demonstrated that public opinion was solidly ranged against the notorious Act. People of all castes and creeds, rich and poor, educated and uneducated assembled in one part of the Marina Beach suspending all their daily avocation devoting the whole day to fasting and prayer because Satyagraha was purely an “inward and purifying movement”.<sup>48</sup>

The Madras Satyagraha Sabha under the leadership of Rajaji, A. Rangaswamy Iyengar, G. Harisarvottama Rao and T. Audinarayana Chetty called upon all who loved the country to fast and pray on 6 April; and desired every hamlet, village and town to pass a resolution on the same day regarding the fast, their feelings towards the Rowlatt Act and prayers to the Secretary of State and the Viceroy to have the law revoked.<sup>49</sup> Even the Moderates said on the day of the *hartal* that the Delhi scene would not be repeated in Madras<sup>50</sup> although they failed to see the direct connection between the Delhi riots and the repeal of the obnoxious law. All shops including vegetable markets were closed and fishermen

missed their catch for the day not under duress but out of a free will to join a movement which affected the vital interests of their country. The police too, to their credit, abstained from displaying their authority and desisted from suppressing an orderly protest.<sup>51</sup>

The Satyagrahis might not have succeeded in moving the Government to strike the pestilential Act off the Statute Book forthwith. But inasmuch as they showed their whole-hearted disapproval of the law in no uncertain terms on 6 April, it was a day of hope for Satyagraha “which always conquers and never fails”. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Satyagraha of 6 April certainly broke the spirit underlying the Act and made it a dead letter. The Satyagrahis took a pledge to the effect that until the Rowlatt Act was withdrawn “we shall refuse civilly to obey these laws and such other laws as a committee hereafter to be appointed may think fit and we further affirm that in this struggle we will faithfully follow truth and refrain from violence to life, person or property”.

The Madras papers featured reports of the observance of the Satyagraha day on their leader pages. *The Hindu* which had been carrying on a raging campaign against the Bill right from the day when the debate on it started in the Indian Legislative Council, devoted several columns to the conduct of the “Satyagraha Day” both in the city and mofussil centres. The following is an excerpt from its comment on the events of the day: “The absolute spontaneity of the movement, its vast scale, the tremendous enthusiasm which it has aroused, the unimpeachable simplicity and honesty of purpose of those who participated in it — and no attempt was made to misrepresent the nature of the legislation—all these unmistakably show the intensity of feeling in the country in respect of the obnoxious measures passed by the official members of the Legislative Council in the teeth of non-official opposition. If the Government makes any pretence of responding to public opinion in any country, then they could not, consistent with such a view of their rule, allow these measures to remain in the Statute Book any longer. Similarly, if the royal veto is of any useful purpose then, in the opinion of the people of this country, His Majesty’s government would find no more justifiable use for it than in regard to this most ill-advised piece of legislation”.<sup>52</sup>

Notwithstanding strong feelings of resentment, hostility and opposition all round, the Sedition Act found its way into the



Statute Book. True, it remained a dead letter throughout. But its mere passage was enough to plant in the minds of the people bitter memories which even time would not erase. While closing the Delhi session of the Legislative Council in April 1919 Chelmsford said, without mincing words, that the mere existence of the Rowlatt Act in the Statute Book would be sufficient. The Nationalists, who prior to the appointment of the Sedition Committee, questioned the propriety of the Government invoking special powers to deal with revolutionaries, averred after the enactment of the Act that even Regulation III of 1818 which the Government had in their armoury was far less oppressive than the Rowlatt legislation!<sup>53</sup> It was effective as a gesture of imperial insolence and, to that extent, it was a gain for the British administration.

But it was only a partial victory for the unrelenting government over the unyielding nationalists. Far from stifling the spirit of nationalism, the Act gave an impetus to it. Having revealed the true face of the British for the first time to Gandhiji, who had hitherto placed an unshakable faith in their sense of justice, the Act paved the way for his launching the Satyagraha, a new movement which gave the politics in India a new turn.

Following the passage of the Bill, took place the Punjab tragedy when, unarmed civilians gathered to attend a public meeting got up at Jallianwalabagh in Amritsar were butchered by the alien rulers. The Imperial Government failed to bring to book and to punish the culprits behind the massacre. About the same time the British had also broken their pledge to the Indian Muslims that they would not betray the interests of the Caliph. This breach of promise and the failure to punish the culprits behind the Punjab massacre shook the faith of the Indian national leaders in the British sense of fair play and justice. This loss of faith and disillusionment gave rise to the Non-co-operation Movement.

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49. Rajaji's letter 27 March 1919, *C. Vijayaraghavachari papers*.
50. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri to Uamana Rao, 6 April 1919, *Srinivasa Sastri papers*.
51. *The Hindu*, 7 April 1919.
52. *Ibid.*
53. George West, *Annie Besant*, p. 240.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# Non-Co-operation Movement— The Origins :

### *Montford Reforms : Plea for fair trial :*

The thirty fourth session of the Indian National Congress was held at Amritsar in December 1919 under the presidency of Motilal Nehru. It was decided there to give a trial to the Reforms Act of 1919. The original resolution on Reforms drafted by C. R. Das\* and approved by the Subjects Committee did no more than reiterate the one moved at the Delhi session of 1918 which described the Act as “inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing”. Tilak was in full agreement with this. Because the Reforms failed to concede any of Congress’ main demands namely, provincial autonomy, diarchy in the Central Government, fundamental rights, fiscal autonomy and a time-limit for securing complete self-government, Das’s resolution called for a rejection of the Reforms Act. It urged upon the Parliament to take early steps to establish Full Responsible Government in India in accordance with the principle of self-determination. But in the open session of the Congress at Amritsar, changes were made in the resolution consequent upon the intervention of Gandhiji. He moved an amendment exhorting the members to omit the word “disappointing”; to agree to work the reforms; and to thank the gentleman who was instrumental in bringing in the reforms. Since none of the three towering personalities—Gandhiji, Tilak and Das—could bear the idea of differing from the other two, a compromise was arrived at. While adhering to the resolutions of the Delhi Congress which characterised the Reforms Act as “inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing”, the final resolution on Reforms had this fresh paragraph added to it: “Pending such introduction, this Congress trusts that, so far as may be possible, the people will so work the Reforms as to secure an early establishment of Full

\* Deshbandhu Chittarajan Das—one of the foremost nationalists of India.



Responsible Government and this Congress offers its thanks to the Rt. Hon'ble E.S. Montagu for his labours in connection with the Reforms". By the first part of the above paragraph Gandhiji could not have meant anything other than entering the reformed Legislative Councils. The amendment struck a middle course and was acceptable to all.\*

Thus, while expressing grave concern about the events in the Punjab earlier in the year and condemning the Government in no uncertain terms for their repression, the Congress also agreed to work the new constitution fashioned by Montagu for what it was worth. There was a strong opposition to it but Gandhiji succeeded in hammering out a compromise eventually. The Amritsar Congress thus witnessed leaders with differing views about the Reforms reach an agreement to take the maximum advantage of them and express their gratitude to their author. As a matter of fact, there was no want of appreciation on the part of the Nationalists for Montagu for his services to India. The question of their gratitude to him was only one of degree. They preferred to think in terms of how much they did not get from the Reforms Scheme.<sup>1</sup> They made it known at this session that they were not satisfied with the Act and that they would therefore demand and agitate for more. They also stated plainly that they could not enthuse effusively over something which they felt was not adequate. "Don't be too generous, too kind, too humane to accept with a fulsome dose of thanks what little has been thrown to you now", said Tilak.

The Amritsar Congress was highly critical of the deeds of Michael O'Dwyer\*\* and Chelmsford: one of the 50 resolutions it passed was a demand for the recall of Chelmsford. The Viceroy who courted the odium of the civilised world by passing the infamous Rowlatt Act stood severely condemned at this session. Even the new clause added to Das's resolution offered the gratitude of the Congress only to Montagu and not to Chelmsford who did not "deserve one iota of thanks and gratitude of the people of

\* C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer wrote to Gandhiji complaining that a left-handed compliment had been paid to Montagu. But Gandhiji promptly corrected him stating that his amendment was indeed "graceful" doing fair justice to Montagu's services to India. (C.P.R.'s letter dated 7 January and Gandhiji's reply dt. 13 January 1920, *CWMG*, Vol. 16, p. 479).

\*\* Lt. Governor of the Punjab under whose regime the Jallianwalabagh massacre took place on 13 April 1919 as also many other shameful deeds leading to the introduction of Martial Law there.

India". It was deemed a "desecration" to associate his name with the Report at all. Urging the recall of Chelmsford, Kasturiranga Iyengar pointed out that Governors and Viceröys should reckon with and be responsive to the people whom they governed. Comparing Chelmsford to Warren Hastings, Satyamurti wondered whether there would be another Burke forthcoming to impeach the former. Later, taking the liberty himself, he impeached the Viceroy "before this National Parliament of India in the name of the people of India whose trust he has betrayed, whose honour he has sullied, in the name of the people of England whose trust also he has betrayed, and in the name of civilised humanity whose conscience he has shocked. . . . He should be brought before the judgement seat of Parliament and condemned. . . ." He said that if Montagu and His Majesty were really anxious to start the Reforms under favourable auspices the least that was expected of them was to recall Chelmsford and "send him back to the battalion where, in his obscurity, he will not harm and not insult the great Indian nation . . . to send this subaltern of parts who became Viceroy as a bye-product of the war and not by his own merit and condemn him to his well-deserved obscurity. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Gandhiji strongly disapproved of the resolutions passed on Chelmsford and Michael O'Dwyer. On a subsequent occasion, commenting over the resolutions, he pronounced the speeches on the recall of Chelmsford to be shameful and condemnable. To insult the Emperor's representative in such discourteous and abusive language was a "blot on the virtues of humility, courtesy and magnanimity which still remain ours."<sup>3</sup>

But men of all shades of opinion protested with one voice against the Punjab atrocities and the utter callousness of the Britishers to the outrages against India. Even the moderate press had no kind word for Chelmsford who seemed to have told some private visitors that he had no reason to be sorry for his Punjab policy and that he wanted every Indian to look to a Britisher as not only his superior but as one belonging to the "conquering race". The Moderates were also displeased with the serious hurdles he put in the way of appointment of Sinha as the Governor of Bihar and Orissa.<sup>4</sup> Some of the prominent leaders among them condemned Chelmsford for doing the greatest disservice to His Majesty the King Emperor by failing to keep the authorities at home duly apprised of the gravity of the situation in India. Dwelling on the Punjab tragedy which proved the blackest page in British Indian History G.A. Natesan



wrote: "Any attempt at brute force or a policy of repression will only ulcerate the wound that ought to be quickly healed. The only remedy, the straight and honourable remedy, is for His Majesty's Government to take the earliest opportunity to express contrition for the great wrong inflicted on the Indian people and to insist on the Government of India carrying out to the very letter of its injunction to mete out adequate punishment on the (British) offenders in the Punjab and not to make a travesty of it as has been sought to be done by the Government of Lord Chelmsford."<sup>5</sup>

Valentine Chirol, the special correspondent of the *London Times* who was no stranger to India, avowed publicly in its columns:

Unless the Government takes definite steps to assuage the rankling sense of racial humiliation engendered by the Punjab methods of repression before the new Councils meet and themselves reopen the question on which Indian opinion is unanimous, I fear that merely repressive measures against Gandhism may prove futile, and the reforms about to be inaugurated in the worst possible atmosphere will wither before they can bear fruit, and between official optimism or inertia, and the sapping of the revolutionary forces, we shall drift still further into chaos and disaster.<sup>6</sup>

After all the censure emanating from different quarters, it was expected of Chelmsford to resign gracefully. But he did not do so. Nor did the Home Government choose to recall him. Contrary to expectations, his Cabinet expressed full faith in the Viceroy and what was worse, their despatch to the Secretary of State contained encomia not only on the Viceroy but also on Michael O'Dwyer! On top of it all was the passage of the motion in the House of Lords deploring even the inadequate punishment awarded to General Dyer by His Majesty's Government\*.<sup>7</sup>

Having given vent to their pent-up feelings, the Nationalists at Amritsar loyally acquiesced in the decision of the Congress which was followed by vigorous propaganda carried throughout India on the lines of the Congress resolution. They did so in the hope that the Punjab wrongs would be righted and the *Khilafat*\*\* question settled as per the aspirations of the Muslims in India.

\* He was relieved of his command and consequently perhaps lost his pension. But the English ladies in India presented him a purse of £20,000. He was further honoured by the presentation of a sword both in England and in India.

\*\* *Khilafat* is the Muslim rendering of the "Caliphate". It refers to the agitation of the Indian Muslims against the treatment meted out by the European powers to their "Calipha"—the Sultan of Turkey who was regarded as the supreme head of

*Reversal in attitude:*

The conducive atmosphere for the reforms created by the Amritsar Congress lasted hardly six months. A revulsion of feeling swept over the entire country which felt betrayed by the Government's refusal to render justice on the two issues of the Punjab and the *Khilafat*. As for the Punjab excesses, the authorities failed to punish the malefactors. The findings of the seven-member Hunter Committee appointed by the Government of India to investigate into the disturbances in the Punjab filled the country with despair and disgust. Stating that the Punjab had been in open rebellion since April 1919, the Report justified the introduction of Martial Law there to combat the threat to the British *Raj*. But it admitted that the Martial Law had been "unseemingly protracted and harsh". This report published in May 1920 was not unanimous: the three Indian Members of the Committee differed from the English. The "majority" report of the four English members was marred by bias and racial prejudice which were the result of "insufficient consideration of evidence". There was also an indecent desire to "slur over the proved manifest iniquities of the Government officials concerned and to whitewash the conduct of the Punjab Government and the Government of India".<sup>8</sup> The issue of the minority report of the Indian Members of the Committee, which severely criticised the action of the authorities in the Punjab, aggravated the public antagonism to the majority report. The AICC also appointed an unofficial Enquiry Committee to investigate the causes of the Punjab wrongs and Gandhiji was himself one of its members. The conclusions of this Committee also contrasted with those of the majority report of the Hunter Committee. The Congress report was marked by impartiality and thoroughness of investigation. It was moderate and restrained in tone in speaking of the most "blood-curdling" atrocities in the Punjab. If at all it erred, it did so only on the side of moderation. Gandhiji minced no words when he wrote to the Viceroy that Michael O'Dwyer was totally unfit to hold the office of the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab and that his policy contributed largely to the infuriation of the mob at

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the Muslim community and the Vice-regent of the Prophet Mohammad. Towards the close of the First World War, the Sultan was made a prisoner in his own palace in Constantinople, deprived of all his political and religious authority. The *Khilafat* Movement aimed at restoring his Caliphial powers to him.



Amritsar. While the mob excesses resulting in the murder of five Englishmen and the assault on Miss Sherwood were unpardonable, the punitive measures adopted by General Dyer and his fellow officers were “out of all proportion to the crime of the people and amounted to wanton cruelty and inhumanity almost unparalleled in modern times”.<sup>9</sup>

It is necessary to state here that V. S. Srinivasa Sastri tabled two resolutions in the Imperial Council relating to the Punjab riots and the Hunter Committee Report. But the Viceroy disallowed them both—an act which was disapproved even by Willingdon. The latter notified his disagreement with the Viceroy’s action “in a matter of great public importance”.<sup>10</sup>

As for the *khilafat*, the Treaty of Sevres\* signed between the Allies and Turkey in 1920 further antagonised the Muslims. It may be mentioned in the passing that much was made of the *Khilafat* in India by projecting it as a serious religious issue. No doubt the Turkish peace terms unduly interfered with the *Khilafat*. The terms were also a clean violation of the pledge made by Premier Lloyd George to concede to the Turks the sovereignty over the two areas—Asia Minor and Thrace—on the principle of nationality. Nobody could doubt even for a moment the need for the Hindus to extend help to their Muslim brethren. Nor could any true Indian deny the cruel treatment meted out to the people of Turkey by the British. But the point at issue is whether the *Khilafat* question really posed a serious “religious calamity” to the Muslims in India. How could the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire imperil the religious life of the Indian Muslims? The Muslims in British India had the freedom to practise their religion unhampered. Since the British in India had always been scrupulously following a policy of non-intervention in the religious affairs of the governed, their *Khilafat* policy *vis-a-vis* Turkey could by no stretch of imagination be considered as a “religious calamity” to the Muslims in India. Anyone acquainted with the history of Turkey or its attitude towards India in the past would know that India was going out of the way to condole with Turkey. For even in its halcyon days, the *Khilafat* looked on “unconcernedly” when India was overwhelmed by foreign invaders.<sup>11</sup>

One of the most beneficent results of the *Khilafat* Movement was that it united the Muslims with the Hindus in working towards

\* This Treaty was later superseded by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

a concrete common programme of non-co-operation with the British Government. And so, the British had for the first time to face a concerted campaign which “aimed at the early overthrow of British rule, and it threatened at the very least, widespred disorder”.<sup>12</sup>

The Imperial Government had acted in an “unscrupulous, immoral and unjust manner and have been moving from wrong to wrong in order to defend their immorality. I can retain neither respect nor affection for such a Government”, wrote Gandhiji to Chelmsford. He returned his *Kaisar-i-Hind* Gold Medal granted to him by Viceroy Hardinge for his humanitarian work in South Africa; the Zulu War Medal granted in South Africa for his services as Officer-in-charge of the Indian Volunteer Ambulance Corps in 1906; and the Boer War Medal for his services as Assistant Superintendent of the Indian Volunteer Stretcher Bearer Corps during the Boer War of 1899–1900. Commenting on Gandhiji’s gesture Gwynne of the Home Department wrote that Gandhiji was trying to secure the crown of martyrdom and that his new movement went beyond the limit of what was reasonable. He stated that if no action had been taken against him it was because the British Government no longer regarded him as “worth the powder and shot”. In his opinion, the Non-co-operation Movement and with it Gandhiji’s influence would die of inanition if they were just left alone.<sup>13</sup>

The attitude of the Imperial as well as the Indian Governments in regard to the aforesaid two wrongs—the Punjab and the *Khilafat*—estranged Gandhiji completely from the British Indian Government. They formed the genesis of his Non-co-operation Movement. They turned Gandhiji, who had welcomed the proclamation announcing the Royal Assent to the Government’s Reform Act only a few months earlier and persuaded the Congress at Amritsar to accept to work the Reforms, into a non-co-operator. He could now see clearly that the country’s honour, dignity and freedom could not be upheld by pursuing the conciliatory policy towards the British as adopted at Amritsar. He was convinced that it would be *infra-dig* for India to accept what the British politicians chose to call “freedom”. Such “freedom” would be conferred on India “in English politicians’ own way, at the English politicians’ own time and at English politicians’ own discretion.”<sup>14</sup> Gandhiji found the only answer to the injustice perpetrated by a Government which was holding icily aloof from the governed was his policy of non-co-operation.



In fact, as early as 10 March 1920, Gandhiji had, for the first time, perhaps in anticipation of the Government's response to Congress demands, embodied his ideas and plans for non-co-operation in a Manifesto. This Manifesto issued in May 1920, signified the "Great Refusal" of the Nationalists to co-operate with the Government until justice was done. The Manifesto ordained that it was the moral duty of every Indian to withdraw his co-operation from the British regime. If the *Satyagraha* of April 1919 was launched to protest against the passage of the Rowlatt legislation, the Non-co-operation Movement of 1920 aimed not only at agitating over the two main issues of the Turkish peace treaty and the Punjab atrocities but also at achieving *Swaraj*. It was a call to the whole nation to declare war against the enemy—a war to be waged *sans* weapons, *sans* bloodshed. It was to be waged through suffering and sacrifice and a deliberate refusal to co-operate with the Government. The non-co-operators would face the fury of repression and suffer the consequences in patience and with supreme indifference. Such non-violent non-co-operation was the "clearest remedy" as in the prevailing circumstances co-operation with the Government would mean "degradation or humiliation or an injury to one's cherished religious sentiment".<sup>15</sup> However, even while launching the Non-co-operation Movement, Gandhiji asked the Viceroy to summon a conference of the recognised leaders of the people and in consultation with them find a way that would placate the Musalmans and do reparation to the unhappy Punjab.<sup>16</sup> Strangely enough, the stand of Gandhiji *vis-a-vis* the Nationalists was now reversed. At Amritsar, it may be remembered, Gandhiji's appeal for co-operation with the Government was opposed by them though later they were won over. The very same men now ranged themselves against Gandhiji when he turned a non-co-operator.

### *The Madras milieu:*

In the Madras Presidency, the *Khilafat* movement gained considerable momentum. In fact it had taken deep roots in the Presidency even before the Non-co-operation Movement was formally launched, although numerically the Muslim population of the Presidency was very small. Its total Muslim population was only 7 per cent. Even this small minority was sharply divided into three groups which the *Khilafat* issue further widened. The loyalist group

headed by the Prince of Arcot disapproved of the Lucknow Pact or the Congress-League Scheme as did the Justice party. Mohammad Usman of this faction was the chief Muslim spokesman of the Justice party. Another group comprising both Tamil and Urdu speaking Muslim businessmen was led by Yakub Hasan, the founder of the Madras branch of the Muslim League. He was also one of the architects of the Lucknow Pact. Yet another group composed of the Urdu speaking Muslims was led by the "fierce Pan-Islamist" Abdul Majid Sharar who was the Editor of the *Quami Report*, a Urdu newspaper. This group had among its followers, students from Aligarh who were fired by Pan-Islam. Rajaji befriended the second group—the Moderate Muslims led by Yakub Hasan and cultivated its co-operation with the Congress over the *Khilafat*. By May 1920, the Hasan—Rajaji alliance was in control of the provincial *Khilafat* Committee, isolating the Sharar faction. The result was, by May 1920, Hasan and his associates had complete control of the Provincial *Khilafat* Committee, much to the exasperation of Sharar.

On account of Rajaji's influence, the *Khilafat* Committees in the Presidency became "as much Hindu enterprises as Muslims'". In Trichinopoly which was one of the active *Khilafat* centres during the years 1920 to 1922, the *Khilafat* Committee was directed by two friends of Rajaji—T.S.S. Rajan and T.V. Swaminatha Sastri. They were assisted by Sayid Murtuza Saheb and Khaja Mian Ravuttar. Because of the Hindu support to the *Khilafat* movement here, the Madras Government characterised the Presidency as a "backwater of the (*Khilafat*) agitation".<sup>17</sup> The observance of 17 October 1919 as the first *Khilafat* day in answer to the call of Gandhiji would amply testify to the early roots of *Khilafat* in the Presidency. The telegraphic message of Taj-ud-din-Arif, Organiser of the *Khilafat* Day at Bombay sent to some of the newspapers in Madras speaks highly of the work done in Madras to make the *Khilafat* Day a success. It read "... C. Rajagopalachari and his friends in the provincial congress, who were already engaged in bringing about a Hindu-Muslim *entente* enthusiastically responded to the message. They persuaded the Hindus to co-operate with the Muslims. And they did succeed in prevailing on the Hindu shop-keepers too, for on 17 October almost all the shops in the bazaar were closed".<sup>18</sup> The Government as usual minimised the intensity of the *Khilafat*. The European sections grossly misinterpreted the Hindu-Muslim *en-*



*tente* when they stated that in Madras the *Khilafat* had acquired a distinctive Hindu lead. They also underrated the *hartal* of 19 March 1920 which was observed by the *Khilafatist* organisations as a day of fast and mourning in support of the Mohammadan claim that Turkey and the *Khilafat* should be reinstated in the position they occupied prior to the War. The Government knew that one of the resolutions to be passed at all meetings on that day contained the threat that if peace terms did not conform to certain requirements, Muslims would be forced to sever their loyal connection with the British throne. So an order was issued forbidding the Government servants from joining the *hartal*. Even so, excitement rose high on this day and almost all the shops remained closed although the Government called it an uneventful day and maintained that the real promoters of the *hartal* were not Mohammadans at all but were Hindu politicians.

Shaukat Ali visited Madras in 1920 to Preside over the *Khilafat* Conference on 21 April. Delegates from all over the Presidency numbering over 6000 attended this conference. Only the leaders of the Justice and Liberal parties and the Home Rule League abstained from it. In a memorable speech, characterised by the Government as “fiery in tone”, Shaukat Ali said that if their efforts of conciliation failed, “we would start a joint Hindu-Muslim Non-co-operation Movement in India under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, a man who commands the respect and love of both the Hindu and the Muslim. We have received the promise of full active support of that great and brave son of India, Lokamanya Tilak, one who has unflinchingly worked for the uplift of his motherland. . . . The first step in the Non-co-operation Movement would be the stopping of giving donations, war loans, giving up of honorary posts, titles, memberships of Councils, etc. The second step will be the giving up of civil posts from the highest to the lowest ranks. The third step will be giving up of Police and Military services. The fourth, non-payment of all kinds of taxes. We know what the above mean. What untold suffering will be our lot! We do not embark on this step without fully realising what it means. It means a movement for absolute independence. We have promised Mahatma Gandhi . . . that there should be no violence on our part while we are carrying on this propaganda; any retaliation or use of violence even under grave provocation would damage our cause which is dearer to us than our life. Twenty or thirty deputations would soon be touring round the country to collect the signed pledges from the Muslims

as, after all, it is they who should bear the greater part of the burden. It is a portion of their faith, a matter of life and death. Mahatma Gandhi would deal with our Hindu brethren in his own way".<sup>19</sup> The other prominent leaders who spoke on this occasion were Kasturiranga Iyengar (Vice President of the Madras Presidency *Khilafat* Conference), T. Prakasam and Rajaji. The Conference carried a resolution which appealed to all Indians to abstain from co-operation with the British Indian Government on the issue of the *Khilafat*.<sup>20</sup> Later when Gandhiji, Shaukat Ali, Maulana Azad and other leaders toured extensively throughout the Presidency of Madras in August, 1920, Gandhiji asked the people to replace their oft-shouted slogans—"Mahatma Gandhi-ki-jai" and "Mahomed Ali, Shaukat Ali-ki-jai"—by "Hindu-Musalman-ki-jai", as without it there was no victory for India.<sup>21</sup>

There was another *Khilafat* conference held almost the same time at Erode over which Mahomed Ali presided. Pleading for Hindu-Muslim unity, he said: "They (the Hindus) have all come in with a clean recognition of this point, that in so far as they desire to have a common Indian nation, and we form a part of that nation what affects us so closely must be a matter concerning Hindus also. This is an all-India question. They are just as committed to any cause as we ourselves".

With the publication of the peace terms with Turkey in May 1920, the Muslims of Madras became very outspoken. Yakub Hasan resigned his seat in the Legislative Council and also his membership on the Prince of Wales Reception Committee. The meeting of the *Khilafat* Committee at Bombay on 28 May 1920 adopted the non-co-operation programme as the only means left for the Muslims then. But the AICC meet at Benares on 30 May did nothing of the sort. It discussed the Hunter Committee Report and the Turkish Peace terms. When Gandhiji's programme of non-violent non-co-operation was placed, it was agreed after a lengthy debate that the best way of tiding over the question was to refer it to a special session of the Congress. It was later known that this was a deliberate plan set by S. Srinivasa Iyengar through his friends S. Satyamurti and A. Rangaswami Iyengar, as the former could not declare himself in favour of or against non-co-operation. All the Hindus in the Congress readily fell in with the proposal to postpone a decision.<sup>22</sup>

In the meantime, Gandhiji had decided to refer the question of non-co-operation to a conference of leaders of all parties which



met at Allahabad on 2 June 1920. At this Conference the *Khilafat* Committee duly reckoned with contrary views and reaffirmed its commitment to the resolution on non-co-operation and decided to give a month's notice to the Viceroy before launching the programme. This Conference appointed a Committee consisting of Gandhiji himself and some Muslim leaders to draft the details of the programme of non-co-operation. The final programme comprised not only the renunciation of titles and posts under Government and honorary posts and memberships of the Councils but also the boycott of schools and colleges and of law courts and refusal to pay tax. Gandhiji made it absolutely plain that whosoever approved of the policy of non-co-operation in principle had necessarily to recognise that surrender of titles, boycott of councils, withdrawal of boys and girls from schools, suspension of practice as lawyers, boycott of the proposed visit of the Prince of Wales and vigorous prosecution of *Swadeshi* were the "chief essentials of any effective programme of non-co-operation".<sup>23</sup> The very first step which was renunciation of titles and honorary positions involved minimum sacrifice with no danger to public peace. It was incumbent on those who would not co-operate with the Government to surrender all titles of honour which were "no longer a proud possession".<sup>24</sup> On the issue of council-entry, it was deemed that the policy of co-operating to the extent of winning seats in councils in order to wreck the Government as proposed by some would amount to half non-co-operation but not a full one. Against an insolent and strong Government like that of India, there could be no half way measures.<sup>25</sup> All Government-managed, aided or recognised educational institutions whose primary concern was to manufacture clerks and servants for the Government must be emptied, with the parents withdrawing their children and the teachers resigning their posts from them. The school teachers who relinquished their positions could take charge of national schools and teach their wards. Lawyers must give up practice and litigants must boycott courts which upheld the prestige of an unjust Government. The lawyers were not to keep idle but would improvise arbitration boards to settle disputes.<sup>26</sup> It was the duty of every Indian to boycott the Prince of Wales as the real motive behind the royal visit was to unify and strengthen a Government in which people had lost their faith and hence deserved to be "dismissed with grace".<sup>27</sup> *Swadeshi* had a legitimate place in the Non-co-operation Movement which was conceived in a spirit of sacrifice. Pure *Swade-*

*shi* meant sacrifice of their liking for fineries like the Japanese silk, Manchester calico or French lace and revival of hand-spinning and hand-weaving which flourished in India till the advent of the British.

*The Tinnevely Conference:*

The Madras Nationalists under Kasturiranga Iyengar's lead could not accept Gandhiji's programme *in toto* as they doubted the possibility of implementing it along the lines he suggested. They agreed that non-co-operation was the only legitimate constitutional weapon that they could have recourse to, towards asserting their rights and bringing Britain and her irresponsible agents in India to their senses. But they were not for boycotting the legislatures, educational institutions and law courts. They were particularly opposed to the ban on Council-entry, although they attached very little importance to the new reformed Councils. In their opinion contesting the elections to enter the Councils did not constitute a violation of the principle of non-co-operation which had already gained a foot-hold in the Presidency. They considered the elections which were then in the offing as the only immediate constitutional weapon in their hand; they wanted to utilise it to educate the vast mass of the people not only on their rights and duties but also on the programme of non-co-operation and the mode of practising it. Otherwise they felt, mass civil disobedience would only lead to violence and lawlessness. The Nationalists, as their organ rightly stated, felt that it would be unwise for them "to stand aside from the elections and to give the members of the Moderate party a walk over to their coveted seats in the Councils".<sup>28</sup>

An almost similar view had already been expressed by the General Secretaries of the AICC who concluded their report for 1919 with the fervent hope that the Congress should be able to "carry the torch of political education to the door of the masses and shall soon have developed in the country an intelligent electorate alive to its privileges and capable of turning the administrative machinery under the new Reforms to the best advantage of our Motherland".

The Nationalists of Madras led by Kasturiranga Iyengar did not give their acceptance to the whole plan of non-co-operation but preferred to await the outcome of the Special Congress. But Rajagopalachari and his group did not share this view. They had a



tough time in defending Satyagraha as propounded by Gandhiji. Keen on council-entry the Madras Nationalists had started preparing for the elections. From January to March 1920 Satyamurti and A. Rangaswamy Iyengar toured the whole of the Tamil region of the Presidency campaigning vehemently for the party. Satyamurti who threw himself heart and soul into the vortex of Congress propaganda regaled huge audiences by his thrilling lectures in Tamil for hours on end. His speeches in Tamil proved a great stimulus to Congress activities in the various Tamil districts. Satyamurti was a pioneer in using the mother tongue, a very powerful medium of communication indeed, for awakening political consciousness in the masses. His powers of oration in vernacular alarmed the Moderates of Madras. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, a Moderate was often howled down by the mobs because he was reluctant to speak in Tamil.<sup>29</sup>

The activities of the Madras Nationalists under the lead of Kasturiranga Iyengar towards Council entry made the general public wonder if the Rajaji group would have any place at all once the Congress accepted the Reformed legislature. Satyamurti's recommendation to the Madras Provincial Congress Committee that candidates for contesting elections should be chosen at the next provincial conference caused considerable irritation to Rajaji. He was against mixing the Congress with election affairs lest the Provincial conference should become the undignified scene of personal intrigues instead of being the threshing ground for political views. He wrote, "I feel the electioneering intoxication has completely overpowered the intellects of our leaders. . . ."<sup>30</sup>

The differences between the two groups surfaced for the first time at the Tinnevely Provincial Conference held from 21 to 23 June 1920 under the presidency of S. Srinivasa Iyengar who had by then given up his exalted position as Advocate General. At this conference, "one of the largest attended in recent years,"<sup>31</sup> Kasturiranga Iyengar's group had put forth its plans for the ensuing elections. They even passed a resolution urging the electorate to return only Nationalist members to the Legislative Council.<sup>32</sup> They set up a Subjects Committee to co-ordinate its campaign. Besides their own men the Committee consisted of some local worthies like the Raja of Ramnad, the Zamindar of Kumaramangalam and the well-known and powerful Tinnevely politician NAV Somasundaram Pillai. The only members of the Congress Executive to be included in the Committee were Kasturiranga Iyengar himself and S. Srin-

vasa Iyengar. None of Rajaji's associates was considered initially for a place. It was only when Rajaji threatened to refuse to recognise the Committee that C. Vijayaraghavachari was given a berth in it begrudgingly.<sup>33</sup> The latter did not attend the Tinnevely Conference notwithstanding the exhortations of Rajaji to him to be present there.<sup>34</sup> In fact Rajaji's letters during this period were full of appeals to Vijayaraghavachari to contest the elections for the Legislative Council from Salem as there were distinct gains in his doing so. "Strong men in a position to take responsibilities are not many and the few should not keep back. If among Nationalists such men are not returned, the ministership will surely go to Moderates and our party will soon be discredited."<sup>35</sup> Incredibly, these letters had emanated from one who was a staunch advocate of boycott of Councils!

The *Khilafat* and Non-Co-operation were among the main topics of discussion at the Tinnevely Conference. Though its President S. Srinivasa Iyengar was in full sympathy with the Muslims, he did not explicitly commit himself to either *Khilafat* or non-co-operation. This gave a handle to mischief mongers: they propagated that Srinivasa Iyengar discountenanced any attempt at the weakening of the Government and that he knew that the Government would not be cowed down by the threats of non-co-operation.<sup>36</sup>

Srinivasa Iyengar's Presidential address was highly critical of the Reforms Act and also of the attitude of the Moderates who sought to discredit the Congress simply because they could not any longer control it. Referring to the changed political outlook he said, "A race of practical idealists has come into existence who attend to political education as well as to agitation, to details as well as to principles, to means as well as to ends, to the minor problems of daily administration as well as to the more serious national questions and above all to the poor more than to the rich. Political-mindedness and political activity are no longer confined to the educated classes, but have spread to the land-holding mercantile community and also right through the masses".<sup>37</sup> But the existence of these men was not recognized either by the Government or by those who stood for "Co-operation at all costs".

Reinforcing the decision arrived at the Amritsar Congress, this conference adopted a resolution emphasising the unsatisfactory nature of the Reform Act. It did not also conceal its lack of faith in certain aspects of Gandhiji's programme of non-co-operation. It



passed on to the Special Congress the responsibility of deciding whether or not the resolution should be carried into effect. Europeans called this a stunt and accused the Madras Nationalists as irresponsible politicians whose privilege it was to shirk responsibility. They also ridiculed Gandhiji's invitation to the Viceroy to lead the Non-co-operation Movement. They called it a huge joke and Gandhiji an "incurably thoughtless person".<sup>38</sup>

The Tinnevely Conference, however, passed an additional resolution calling for non-co-operation on the *Khilafat* issue. It was proposed by Yakub Hasan and was carried through the exertions of Rajaji. The motion had the support of the League of Youth and the *Khilafat* Muslims who were there at the invitation of Rajaji, the nationalist opposition notwithstanding.<sup>39</sup> The Tinnevely Conference was potentially explosive. There was every possibility of a split over the extent of non-co-operation. The group led by Kasturiranga Iyengar was not in favour of the radical aspects of the non-co-operation programme advocated by Gandhiji. Fortunately however a split was avoided for the nonce. That Rajaji was concerned about averting a split was amply borne out by his subsequent correspondence with C. Vijayaraghavachari. In more than one letter, he exhorted the latter to meet S. Srinivasa Iyengar and have a frank talk with him and settle matters.<sup>40</sup> To quote his own words: "As things now stand, it is not impossible to avoid a split and we may yet appear before the public as a single party without any differences or at least with all differences made up".<sup>41</sup> But as the subsequent turn of events bore out, this was not to be. The personality clashes which led to bitter factional conflicts later could be traced to this conference.

In the beginning of August, when the massive Tilak Memorial Fund was set up, the Rajaji group was again squeezed out. The best any of its members could obtain in the office of the Fund was a minor position shared with the manager of the *Swadesamitran*.<sup>42</sup> On 5 August at the meeting of the Madras Provincial Congress Committee, Kasturiranga Iyengar and his Nationalist party rejected the Tinnevely resolution of non-co-operation on *Khilafat*.<sup>43</sup> Rajaji brought a fresh resolution but the decision on it was postponed to another meeting on 15 August.

In the meantime, in response to Gandhiji's instruction, 1 August 1920 was observed as the Third *Khilafat* Day in the Presidency under the inspiration of Rajaji and Yakub Hasan. It was declared a "day of *hartal*", signalling the inauguration of the Non-co-

operation Campaign. There was a general *hartal* with offering of prayers and meeting on the Madras beach. Shops remained closed both in the city and in the mofussils.

On 12 August Gandhiji came to Madras with Shaukat Ali to visit some of the principal Muslim centres. He did his best to allay the fear of the Nationalist critics of Madras. Both the leaders addressed a mammoth gathering at the beach the same evening. This being Gandhiji's first appearance in the Presidency since the beginning of the Non-co-operation Movement, he spoke at length explaining to the public the tenets of the campaign. He said non-co-operation was a means to gain the two specific objects of redemption of the "promise" given to the Muslims on the *Khilafat* and of the redressal of the Punjab wrongs; it should also aim at the boycott of the Legislative Councils, the courts by lawyers who would definitely find alternative occupation in arbitration and *Swadeshi* Courts, and withdrawal of students from educational institutions, which were just factories to train clerks. "I want no revolution", he told his audience, "I want ordered progress. . . . I want real order to be evolved out of this chaos which is represented to me as order".<sup>44</sup>

Gandhiji reiterated that the Movement was perfectly constitutional. It was a just and religious doctrine and it was the "inherent right of every human being and it is perfectly constitutional".<sup>45</sup> When a representative of the *Madras Mail* asked whether Gandhiji was satisfied that all efforts at constitutional agitation had been exhausted and that non-co-operation was the only course left to them, he replied promptly that non-co-operation was not unconstitutional and that it was the only constitutional remedy left over to them.<sup>46</sup> He agreed with the Madras Nationalists that the last stages of the programme were fraught with danger but assured them that mass civil disobedience would not be resorted to unless the Central Khilafat Committee was convinced that there would be no outburst of violence on the part of the people. However, on the issue of Council boycott, he refused to compromise. Seeking election and then refusing to take the oath of allegiance would make "the nation distrust their leaders". He also rejected the nationalists' idea of entering the Legislative Councils and then wrecking the Reforms Scheme. Gandhiji believed that participation in any form in the Reforms Scheme proffered by the British Government would make the Nationalists the "Unwilling instruments of injustice". He also dismissed their contention that they had to con-



test the elections in order to pre-empt the Liberals from winning seats. Seeking elections to the councils on any terms whatsoever would be “inconsistent with non-co-operation”.<sup>47</sup> Before the end of August, boycott of Councils had become the central item of his programme.

Gandhiji and Shaukat Ali visited North Arcot, Kumbakonam, Nagore, Trichinopoly, Calicut, Mangalore, Salem and Bangalore and on their way back visited Bezwada. There was a good response in all places to Gandhiji's appeal for funds and there was an increase in the number of resignations of honorary offices and titles. Several honorary magistrates also resigned.

Gandhiji's sojourn in the Presidency did not, however, diminish the Nationalists' opposition to the non-co-operation programme. Presiding over the Madras Provincial Congress on 15 August, Kasturiranga Iyengar spoke at length on the necessity of having a Nationalist majority in the legislatures. The Moderates too, who were present at the Congress, expressed their total opposition to the programme of non-co-operation. They held that inasmuch as it was designed to paralyse the Government it was unconstitutional and opposed to the tenets of the Congress which aimed at achieving *Swaraj* by constitutional means. Since the Nationalists also would not go the whole hog of it, final decision on non-co-operation was again postponed. After prolonged debates and discussions, it was approved on 24 August but in a form more cautious than Gandhiji's plan and without the Council boycott.<sup>48</sup>

### *The Calcutta Special Session:*

It was in these circumstances of “exceptional gravity” that the Special Session of the National Congress, the second of its kind, was held at Calcutta on 4, 6 and 8 September 1920. From the Madras Presidency a contingent of 306 delegates, which included a large number of Muslims from Bangalore, Trichinopoly and the North Arcot Districts attended it. This Special Session of the Congress was presided over by Lala Lajpat Rai. It deliberated on the question of the proposed new course of action which was a major departure from the traditional constitutional path of the Congress.

On the *Khilafat* question it was agreed that both the Indian and the Imperial Governments had signally failed in their duty by the Musalmans of India and that the Prime Minister had deliberately broken his pledge to them. It was therefore incumbent upon every

non-Muslim Indian in every legitimate manner to assist his Muslim brother in his attempt to fight the "religious calamity" that had overtaken him. It was also agreed that in the case of the Punjab, both the Governments had grossly failed to protect the innocent people of that province and to punish the officers guilty of unsoldierly and barbarous behaviour. Then it was declared that there could be no contentment in India without the redressal of these two wrongs; and the only effective means of vindicating national honour and preventing a repetition of similar wrongs in future would be the establishment of *Swaraj*. The only course left open to the people of India to attain this end, the delegates argued, was to adopt the policy of progressive non-violent non-co-operation inaugurated by Gandhiji until the two wrongs were righted and *Swaraj* established.

Since the alien Government consolidated its power through titles and honours bestowed on the subject race, and through educational institutions, law courts and legislative councils run by it, the Congress expected of its countrymen the following: (1) surrender of titles and honorary offices and resignation from nominated seats in local bodies; (2) refusal to attend Government *levees*, *darbars* and other official functions held by Government officials or in their honour; (3) gradual withdrawal of their children from schools and colleges owned, aided or controlled by Government and replacing them with National schools and colleges in the various provinces; (4) gradual boycott of British Courts by lawyers and litigants and establishment of private arbitration courts for settlement of private disputes; (5) refusal on the part of the military, clerical and labouring classes to offer themselves as recruits for service in Mesopotamia; (6) withdrawal by candidates of their candidature for election to the Reformed Councils and refusal on the part of the voters to vote for any candidate who may, despite the Congress advice, offer himself for election; and (7) boycott of foreign goods. In this programme of non-co-operation, precedence was given to the boycott of councils so that its impact could become immediately perceptible through the elections scheduled in December of the same year.

Paralysis of the Governmental machinery was expected to be achieved by the resignation of civil servants, police and troops; and by civil disobedience against unjust laws, the refusal to pay taxes. The No-tax campaign which would be the last resort would bring the agitation to its climax as mass civil disobedience would either expel the British from India or force them to heed India's demands.



To train every man, woman and child in such discipline and self-sacrifice which were essential to practise non-co-operation, the Congress advised the adoption of *Swadeshi* in piecegoods on a vast scale. Again, since the existing mills of India with indigenous capital and control did not manufacture sufficient yarn and cloth for the requirements of the nation, the Congress was anxious to obviate the deficiency. It advised the immediate encouragement of further manufacture of yarn and cloth on a large scale by reviving hand-spinning in every home and hand-weaving by the millions of weavers who were forced to abandon their ancient and honourable calling.

There was opposition to the programme from many quarters at the Special Session. The group led by Annie Besant, L. A. Govindaraghava Iyer and others was against the whole principle and programme of non-co-operation and urged the acceptance of the Reforms Act. Even Congress circles close to Gandhiji could not accept his programme in its entirety. It was resisted by Bipin Chandra Pal and C.R. Das. The President Lajpat Rai himself could not see eye to eye with the progenitors of the Non-co-operation Movement and so he predicted only its failure.

Ultimately, however, Gandhiji triumphed. His resolution was adopted in its original form: all amendments proposed were debated and rejected. It was passed by 1886 delegates against 884\*. Out of the 5800 odd delegates registered at the Congress only 2770 had voted. Obviously more than 3000 delegates had absented themselves at the time of voting. This pattern of voting naturally led many to question whether the Special Congress resolution on non-co-operation represented the opinion of the entire country.<sup>49</sup> Regarding Madras, Rajaji had made all efforts to organise a good following for non-co-operation. In spite of the stand taken by Kasturiranga Iyengar and Satyamurti, President and Secretary respectively of the Madras Provincial Congress Committee, 161 of the delegates from the Tamil districts voted for non-co-operation. Of these 125 were Muslims. Prominent among the 145 delegates who voted against the resolution were V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, A. Rangaswamy Iyengar, and S. Satyamurti.<sup>50</sup> V. O. Chidambaram Pillai, the disciple of Tilak, had little faith in the non-co-operation

\* There is a discrepancy in the figures as according to another version 1826 voted for and 804 against, with 63 remaining neutral.

programme. On his way back from Calcutta, he resigned from the Congress itself.<sup>51</sup>

The non-co-operation resolution of the Calcutta Special Congress did not find a wide acceptance in the Madras Presidency. The Nationalists openly declared their disagreement with certain steps recounted in the non-co-operation resolution. Gandhiji was blamed of being "mercilessly logical" in imposing on his followers conditions the rigour of which was greater than they could bear. Originally Gandhiji designed his programme as a means of redressal of the two insults on India—the *Khilafat* and the Punjab massacre; later he extended it to *Swaraj*, claiming that his programme, if carried out sincerely, would lead to India's independence by the end of 1921. The Nationalists whole-heartedly approved of his original conception of non-co-operation as a weapon to seek redressal for the two major grievances. They agreed that it was the moral duty of every Indian to refuse to co-operate with the haughty colonial government. Non-co-operation at this stage was in the nature of a protest which was non-violent and non-coercive.

But Gandhiji's new programme was by no means confined to the redressal of the two grievances alone. His extension of his objective to establishing *Swaraj* before the end of 1921 did not find favour with the Madras Nationalists. They would have the programme restricted to a simple protest against the two insults. They felt that the Government must be given time to set right the wrongs. And non-co-operation as accepted at the Special Congress could be launched only after warning the Government duly. But Gandhiji was determined to advance farther from the protest stage to assert the rights of self-determination by bringing about a complete paralysis of the Governmental machinery. The last step would be the advocacy of *Swaraj* and the ending of the *Raj*. It was widely feared that non-violence would become a permanent feature of the freedom movement. The Madras Nationalists did not want non-violent non-co-operation to be an end in itself but only a means to an end—the end being the conversion of an unjust Government into a just one. Non-co-operation with an unjust Government was a sacred duty of every Indian. But if Britain persisted in its existing policy and continued to hold India by the sword, India would have to free herself only by the sword. There was nothing sacrosanct about the British connection and if they did not treat India on a status of equality, India had every right to repudiate the British connection.

Gandhiji's own statement apropos of the aforesaid resolution



further confounded the Nationalists. He said that if he had to choose between the Hindu-Muslim unity and the British connection, he would have the first and reject the other because he deemed a real substantial unity between the two communities to be infinitely superior to the British connection. "If I had to choose between the honour of the Punjab, anarchy, neglect of education (of my children), shutting out of legislative activity and the British connection, I would choose the honour of the Punjab and all it meant, even anarchy, shutting out of all schools etc. without slightest hesitation". The Nationalists however had a different opinion about the issue on hand. They felt that non-co-operation with its basic quality of non-violence was incompatible with chaos, anarchy and disorder. They deemed that Gandhiji wrongly advocated the Sinn Fein's\* attitude *sans* its methods, which were reprehensible, to bring about a complete paralysis of the Government.

The Madras Nationalists could not also share Gandhiji's optimism that *Swaraj* was around the corner. In their opinion, Gandhiji was only advocating a "forlorn hope". They averred that he was mistaking India for South Africa. They were convinced that the methods successfully adopted by Gandhiji in South Africa would not work in India.<sup>52</sup> There were also misgivings among a large section of the educated about the advisability of securing *Swaraj* at that juncture when India was thoroughly defenceless not only in the north but in the south as well. There was substance in the fear that at that moment India could not defend herself from outside aggression if the British connection was cut off. Northern borders, it was feared, would become scenes of immediate disorder and violence. South India was not free from its own perils either. None of the ports of the great Indian sea-board had any defence worth its name beyond the might of the British fleet.<sup>53</sup> *Swaraj*, they felt, had to await the provision of adequate defence for these key areas.

The apprehensions and reservations which constituted the reaction in the Presidency to Gandhiji's programme were not unfounded. Again, unlike the previous political movements which were confined to the urban intelligentsia, non-co-operation was essentially a movement of the masses. There was therefore every need to carry

\* Sinn Fein was the Irish movement for independence. It rejected British colonialism and sought to overthrow the same by violent and reprehensible methods. The Movement was a decade old by then.

the message of the Congress to every home and every hamlet. The humble rural folk had particularly to be enlightened on the sovereignty of their collective will in governing the country. As a preliminary step, a sense of the dangers involved in co-operating with a Government which repudiated this fundamental principle had to be created in them. And then they should be enlightened on their duty to refuse to co-operate with a Government that did not listen to their grievances and be trained in the methods of demonstrating it. The success of the programme of non-co-operation therefore depended on persuading a large proportion of the population—urban and rural, to adopt the various items in the programme not excluding the spinning and the weaving of *Khadar*. It was certainly no easy task to bring about this awakening in the nascent heart of the nation and consolidate its energies for the supreme goal of “self-regeneration”. This undertaking called for immense caution, patience and a step by step approach. The ground had to be prepared initially by vigorous propaganda so as to make it acceptable to the majority of the people and to make it really work. The implementation of the programme could only be gradual. Before going ahead with every new phase, they had necessarily to assess its impact on the British Government and also the continuance of popular support. This would be an effective safeguard against mass violence and anarchy. The Madras Presidency was not alone in voicing apprehensions or advocating caution. Leaders in other Presidencies including C. R. Das and Lala Lajpat Rai entertained similar views.

Following the session at Calcutta, the Madras Provincial Congress Committee met under the Presidency of Kasturiranga Iyengar. While accepting the principle of non-co-operation, the MPCC made no secret of its opposition to certain aspects of the Non-co-operation Movement such as the total boycott of educational institutions, courts and Legislative Councils. The first was condemned as “positively suicidal”, the second and third as “impracticable” and “inadvisable” respectively. After hearing Kasturiranga Iyengar and other speakers, the Congress Committee approved a policy of non-co-operation but voted against Gandhiji’s programme.<sup>54</sup>

The Madras Nationalists certainly did not entertain any illusions about the new Councils. They were aware that the Councils would be quite impotent as a vehicle for the “progressive realisation of Responsible Government”. All the same they did not rule



out the possibility of the Councils becoming an “instrument of progress undreamt of in Montaguite or Moderate philosophy”. In such an eventuality, they believed, the boycott of Councils would be “bad tactics”.<sup>55</sup> It would deprive the most talented of Indian patriots of an opportunity to play their role in the larger struggle for freedom as there could be great scope in the new councils for patriotism and self-sacrifice.

The Madras Nationalists were much more vehement in their opposition to the other two steps of boycott of courts and of educational institutions controlled by the Government. There were valid reasons for their stand. Unlike the boycott of Councils which was perhaps the “most inconsiderable” part of the entire programme, the other two involved a real sacrifice and a call upon the patriotism of those concerned. Consequently, their response was bound to be poor. It would be unreasonable to say that all lawyers should desert the courts where innocent men were often on the trial and that all students should be stopped from attending schools and colleges particularly at a time when educational facilities in the Presidency were “hopelessly deficient”. There was not an adequate number of national institutions to cater to the needs of the growing youth of the country. Any hasty withdrawal of youngsters from schools and colleges in the absence of an adequate number of alternative National institutions to absorb them all would only jeopardise the very future of the rising generation. It was this genuine fear and not the fact that Gandhiji “sought to undermine” the British institutions that motivated them to oppose these items in the programme. Some Cambridge scholars have unfortunately given an erroneous version to the reservation of the Madras Nationalists about these points of Gandhiji’s programme of non-co-operation. These scholars allege that non-co-operation on Gandhian lines especially the boycott of educational institutions was “anathema”<sup>56</sup> to the Madras Nationalists who were products of western education deriving their livelihood from the very institutions of British rule. These Cambridge scholars have conveniently overlooked the fact that most of the pioneers in the Indian National Movement were those who had received their higher education in England. In fact a greater proportion of the nationalist leaders in the north had been educated in England compared to leaders of equal stature in the south. Hence the argument that the Madras Nationalists had a vested interest in preserving western legal and educational institutions does not hold water.

A seasoned editor and political thinker of India has rightly pointed out that the boycott of schools “if carried out, would leave India, already overwhelmed by a vast mass of illiteracy, to undertake the responsibilities of *Swaraj* with an entirely illiterate population”.<sup>57</sup> Thus the misgivings of the Madras Nationalists were genuine and non-motivated. They were perhaps aware that the Legislature, the law court and the educational institutions were of different degrees of importance especially as negative weapons in the National Movement. Nevertheless they were of the view that the boycott of these three institutions should either stand or fall together. In bracketing the three institutions together they were with Gandhiji. Whereas the Madras Nationalists were *against* the boycott of all the three, Gandhiji stood *for* a boycott of all. He made it absolutely clear that all the three items would become operative in the immediate future in spite of the word “gradual”<sup>\*</sup> preceding the clauses on the boycott of schools and courts.<sup>58</sup>

Some of the views expressed by the Nationalists of the Presidency which were examined in the foregoing paragraphs no doubt ran counter to those of the protagonists of non-co-operation. All the same they did not even remotely suggest a split in the national party. Gandhiji had himself made it plain and unambiguous that non-acceptance of a particular policy did not preclude a member from calling himself a Congressman. The Nationalist dissenters never met at separate Conferences or formed organisations not affiliated to the Congress as did the Moderates or the Non-Brahmans on earlier occasions. There was a fundamental difference in the very attitudes of these two sections who defected from the National Congress on the one hand and the Nationalist dissenters on the other. The non-Brahman dissenters deserted the Congress in 1916, formed a new party—the Justice Party—and chose to work in alliance with the *Raj*, against the Congress which they decried as Brahman-ridden. They were therefore rebuked in no uncertain terms by the Nationalists.

The Nationalists blamed the Moderates also because they too deserted the parent organisation in 1918 and boycotted the first Special Session of the Congress at Bombay presuming that it would reject the Reforms Scheme wholesale and thus nullify the labours

<sup>\*</sup> The word “gradual” which prefaced clauses “c” and “d” of the Resolution on Non-co-operation dealing with schools and courts, made some to advocate the boycott of Councils as the “immediately operative item”.



of Montagu. Breaking away from the Congress, they set up their own organisation outside the national body. In other words, they transferred their loyalty from the Congress to Montagu. But the Nationalists who could not accept the Non-Co-operation Movement *in toto* did not, even for a moment, jeopardise the position of the Congress as the supreme representative body of the nation. They continued to owe their ungrudging loyalty and allegiance to it. They were fully aware of and recognised the moral force behind the decision of this national body which none loyal to the Congress could afford to ignore. But their loyalty and allegiance to the Congress did not blind their independent reasoning. Their innate reverence for it did not preclude them from pointing out that no resolution of the Congress could be obligatory under all circumstances. There was a limit beyond which "the mandatory character of even the most brass-bound and copper-bottomed of resolutions becomes inoperative. No man can do more than lies in his power or do things which his conscience forbids".<sup>59</sup>

To the anti-Nationalists in the Presidency, this disagreement with the non-co-operation Policy expressed openly by the Nationalists provided the most longed for opportunity to cavil at the latter. The Nationalists were scorned for their "inconsistency" by the Moderate leaders, who also did not appreciate any aspect of Gandhiji's programme which had been adopted at the Calcutta Special Congress. On the contrary, drawing a parallel between Gandhiji and the gambler of Monte Carlo, D.E. Wacha\* stated that Gandhiji would "gamble away the last and even play with loaded dice. That is the danger".<sup>60</sup> That a section of the Nationalists disagreed with Gandhiji was a matter of rejoicing for the Moderates. They freely accused both Gandhiji and the Madras Nationalists. Kasturiranga Iyengar who was nicknamed "Apostle" of the Nationalist party was stated to be caught between the devil and the deep sea. The Moderates were happy that the Special Session of the Congress clearly exhibited "to the public the hollow Nationalists at any rate in this side of India in all their unabashed nakedness".<sup>61</sup> They were accused of doing now the very act which they once reproved the Moderates for. No less a person than C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer complained that the Moderates were unjustly "ostracised" by the Congress executive for not accepting the Amritsar mandate.<sup>62</sup> In reply to this charge, *The Hindu* wrote that

\* Dinshaw Wacha, Moderate leader of Bombay.

whatever penalty was meted to the Moderates, the Nationalists would be prepared to accept themselves.<sup>63</sup>

But the opponents of the Congress would listen to none of these. They were in no mood to judge calmly and dispassionately. Jubilant over the apparently uncertain political situation within the Congress, they revelled in making hysterical accusations. It was said that the Nationalists who opposed the boycott of Councils betrayed the Congress in order to get into that "Raven of bliss", to serve some of their own political ends. Some even pronounced the Congress dead.

Those among the Nationalists who were on the Executive Committee of the Provincial Congress Committee were in a great dilemma, torn as they were between their loyalty to the Congress and their conviction of the unworkability of some of the steps advocated by the non-co-operators. Being the body set up to implement the decisions of the Congress, the task of translating the non-co-operation programme into action would naturally devolve on the Executive Committee. Its Members would have to transmit the policy and directions of the Working Committee of the National Congress to the various District Congress Committees. With no faith in the efficacy of the programme in its totality, most of the members of the Executive Committee felt that they were no longer justified in serving on it. These apart, the action of the majority of the delegates from Madras in casting their votes for non-co-operation was generally regarded as a motion of no-confidence in them. Accordingly Kasturiranga Iyengar, the President, S. Satyamurti and A. Rangaswamy Iyengar, Secretaries, and A.R. Doraiswamy Iyengar and C.R. Srinivasan, Members of the Madras Provincial Congress Executive Committee tendered their resignations on 13 September 1920.<sup>64</sup> To dispel the misgivings that had crept in, in the wake of their resignations, they announced that they continued to be members of the Provincial Congress Committee and that they dissociated themselves only from the Executive Committee.

But their resignations were not accepted by the Congress Committee. Motilal Ghosh, editor of the *Amrit Bazaar Patrika* cabled from Calcutta that Kasturiranga Iyengar and Satyamurti should refrain from resigning. A venerable patriot that he was, Ghosh had always desired that the policy of the *Patrika* and of *The Hindu* should be the same in regard to the Congress. Naturally, he panicked over the attitude of *The Hindu* towards Gandhiji's policy of non-co-operation. His cable to *The Hindu* was followed by a letter to Satyamurti in which he wrote:



“You must have received my yesterday’s telegram addressed to *The Hindu* in which I requested you and Mr. Kasturi Ranga Iyengar not to resign your posts in the Provincial Congress Committee. . . . I am very anxious that none of us should separate ourselves from the Congress and cease to take an active interest in it, whether it be run by Gandhiji or Surendranath Banerjee.

I am anxious that the policy of the *Patrika* and the *Hindu* should be the same in regard to the Congress. Gandhi’s Programme is too lofty for the bulk of our people. . . .

This letter is meant both to you and my friend Mr. Kasturi Ranga. And I hope you will not adopt any definite policy in regard to the Congress and Mr. Gandhi’s programme without any previous consultation with me”.<sup>65</sup>

Including Kasturiranga Iyengar nine members resigned from the Executive Committee of the Madras Provincial Congress Committee. This intensified the rift between Rajaji and Kasturiranga Iyengar. When finally the vacancies were filled up in October 1920, Rajaji manoeuvred to bring in his associates.<sup>66</sup>

The very news of the resignations of the aforesaid personalities added to the rejoicing of their opponents especially the Madras Government. The latter exulted in the happenings as it saw in the attitude of the Nationalists a prospect of the Non-Co-operation Resolution getting very little acceptance in the Presidency. It was a miscalculation. The Government could not understand that the Madras Nationalists were as anxious as any other to strengthen the capacity of the Congress to voice the national sentiment; and that they were desirous to help it to form a programme of action which would commend itself to a majority of responsible men. It must have caused considerable disappointment to the anti-Congress elements in the Presidency to know that the Nationalists dissenters attended the very next session of the Congress held at Nagpur in 1920.

### *Congress’ boycott of elections:*

In pursuance of the Calcutta Congress resolution, some veteran Congress leaders including C. Vijayaraghavachari of Salem withdrew their candidature for membership in the new Councils. Another prominent Congressman, Konda Venkatapayya, member of the Legislative Council resigned his seat. Some more individuals resigned their honorary offices and one returned his Delhi *Darbar* medal and a certificate granted to him on that occasion. As many as 24 persons who had announced their candidature for the new

Council withdrew in response to the appeal of the Congressmen. S. Srinivasa Iyengar who announced his decision to withdraw his candidature for the University seat was persuaded to offer himself again but he resigned his membership later.<sup>67</sup>

The propaganda campaign for non-co-operation had already started in the moffusil areas. Several Congressmen addressed meetings in the southern districts of the Presidency and active movements in favour of non-violent non-co-operation were in full swing in the Krishna, Guntur and Godavari districts. The *Khilafat* agitators were also very active in the Presidency on the eve of the first general elections in October 1920.

The boycott of the Legislative Councils could be called a success in the Presidency, considering the difficulties they had to face. First, the time was too short for the non-co-operators to dissuade the electors from exercising their franchise. Second, the Reforms had enfranchised considerable number of villagers whose support had to be enlisted if the council boycott were to become effective. These villagers had already been approached by the contestants for the Council and educated on the new powers and privileges they would exercise through their elected representatives. It became, therefore, very necessary for the non-co-operators to penetrate into the remotest parts of the villages in order to counteract the effect of the visit of the candidates.<sup>68</sup>

The polling in some districts was as low as 12 per cent; and in none except Bellary and Anantapur, where it was 50 per cent and 46 per cent respectively, did the figure rise above 25 per cent. Surprisingly, some of the booths returned even blank ballot boxes symptomatic of the spirit of the public.<sup>69</sup> The Government's bid to prove that this was normal and on line with the common experience in Britain, United States and other advanced countries froze up before the array of statistics produced by the *Khilafat* office to show that the normal record of those countries was between 60 and 70 per cent.<sup>70</sup> Willingdon himself, who attributed the poor voting to the very bad floods all through the Presidency which made access to the polling stations difficult, was constrained to admit that in certain parts where the non-co-operators were active, the poll was as low as 15 or 16 per cent.<sup>71</sup>

The annual report of the Madras Government for 1919-20 gave as usual a distorted version of the whole picture. It spoke proudly about candidates appearing for every seat in the Provincial Legisla-



tive Council as well as the seats allotted to the Presidency in the Central Legislative Assembly and the Council of State. Obviously, the Government had been worrying itself even as to the very filling of seats! The Government contented itself by saying that the Non-Co-operation Movement was a “miserable failure”. In the same breath it accused the no-co-operators of confining themselves not merely to the preaching of the pure non-co-operation creed but to resorting to such questionable methods as: raising the cry among the innocent voters that the new Councils would inevitably bring new taxation; setting afloat a rumour in rural circles that what the electors had to really give at the booths were “notes” meaning currency (as “vote” had no vernacular equivalent); and keeping deliberately the voters away from the booths by treating them to sumptuous feasts and entertainments outside the towns.<sup>72</sup> The Government refused to admit that the voters of the Presidency who had not taken kindly to the “sham reforms” readily responded to the call of the non-co-operators not to exercise their right of franchise. They also refused to recognise that the generality of the population had been imbued with the spirit of the new weapon of non-violent non-co-operation.

Surprisingly in its report the Government of Madras had expressed no word of appreciation for the Moderates—“Saviours of reforms”—either. This was unfair considering their endeavours to obstruct the Non-Co-operation Movement in order to placate the Government. Contrary to expectations the Report said that “the Moderate politicians, while expressing their appreciation of the new Scheme, took few steps to counteract the campaign carried on by the Nationalists”. About the non-Brahmans, the Report affirmed that “in no single instance did a non-Brahman candidate have to take advantage of the privilege of reservation”. The Report spared none, not even the administration! There was a dig at the Government itself which could not do away with Brahmins. It stated: “. . . A Ministry was eventually formed of three non-Brahman politicians, the office of the Advocate General, which is closely connected with the Government being assigned to a Brahmin of the Moderate type”.<sup>73</sup>

#### *The Nagpur Session: Gandhiji's Spell:*

The thirty-fifth Congress met at Nagpur towards the close of

December 1920, amidst unsettled conditions of the political atmosphere. It was presided over by C. Vijayaraghavachari of Salem, the grand old man of South India. He was a great patriot, an ardent Congressman and a veteran public worker. He had the ability, tact, patience, statesmanship and steering skill which were expected of the President of the Congress whose duties were particularly arduous during this session. This session had to face a momentous problem on the solution of which depended the future of the country. It was also the most largely attended Congress—the total number of delegates being 14,582 of whom about 1,050 were Muslims and 169 women. British friends like Wedgewood, Holford, Knight and Ben Spoor attended the session as fraternal delegates from the British Labour party. Notwithstanding his reservation on the non-co-operation programme, the President co-operated with Gandhiji throughout, even to the extent of vacating the Chair whenever a resolution with which he was not in agreement came up. He was largely responsible for rendering this session a happy and memorable one.<sup>74</sup>

The Nagpur Session was indeed a most notable one not only for the Nationalist dissenters of Madras led by stalwarts like Kasturiranga Iyengar but also for the most assertive Congressmen like Pal, Malaviya, Jinnah, Khaparde and Das. They had all gone there resolutely to throw out the resolution on non-co-operation but were miraculously converted into the Gandhian creed of non-co-operation! Das\* took 250 delegates with him, spending Rs.36,000 from his own pocket to meet all their expenses with a view to undoing the work done at Calcutta.<sup>75</sup> Wedgewood warned in all sincerity against the cult of non-co-operation which, apart from creating fresh problems for India, would hamper the work of their British friends in England in their cause. He advised them against going into the wilderness but to no avail. The miracle had occurred and the Congress, overpowered by the charisma of Gandhiji, willingly reaffirmed the Non-Co-operation Resolution passed at Calcutta. For Gandhiji the Nagpur Congress was a great personal triumph. “It left everyone of the older Congressmen—seniors, leaders and patriarchs—aghast, asking themselves and each other, ‘Who is this man that speaketh with a tone of authority and whence doth he come’”?<sup>76</sup>

\* The first act of Das after returning to Calcutta was to renounce his colossal practice at the High Court Bar for the cause of his Motherland.



The very first resolution of the session declaring the attainment of *Swaraj* the object of the Indian National Congress was incorporated as Article I of the Congress Constitution. The original constitution of Pherozeshah Mehta\* and other members of the “right wing” made it compulsory for every member to sign the Congress “creed” which laid emphasis upon “constitutional methods” of political change. At the Nagpur Congress Gandhiji changed this to “peaceful and non-violent methods”. Gandhiji revised the constitution, rewriting it largely, making provision for an economic programme of *Khadar* spinning and weaving by Congressmen and making home spun attire the uniform of the National Movement throughout India. He believed, and rightly too, that spinning which required little capital would solve the poverty of the Indian peasant who could earn a few annas\*\* daily to supplement his meagre income from the soil. This could also help India get rich by manufacturing her own clothing and other requirements and by ceasing to be exploited by Britain. This was welcomed by the infant industries in India which had established themselves during the war and now faced the danger of being swept away by the attempted return of pre-war conditions.<sup>77</sup> There were, however, strong objections to Gandhiji’s insistence on spinning franchise which required every Congressman to spin daily and laid down the annual quota of yarn for each member. This was withdrawn subsequently to be replaced by a four anna franchise.

Some territorial organisational changes also were brought about at this Congress as the existing ones were found to be too inadequate to implement a mass programme. Linguistic (Congress) provinces replaced the earlier organisational structure which coincided with the provincial boundaries fixed by the Government. Accordingly, the Congress organisation in the Madras Presidency was divided into three provinces—the Andhra Province comprising the northern or Telugu speaking districts, the Tamil Province comprising the southern districts and the Kerala province comprising the Malabar district. South Canara and Bellary were attached to

\* Till 1907, the National Congress functioned without a written Constitution. The Surat tangle of that year caused Pherozeshah Mehta and his associates to take up the task of framing a constitution for the Congress. It was adopted by the Congress of 1908 and was amended by the Congresses of 1911, 1912, 1915, 1916, 1917 and 1918.

\*\* 12 pies made one anna and 16 annas a rupee. One anna was roughly equivalent to 6 paise.

the Carnataka province with headquarters in the Presidency of Bombay. When the strength of the Congress Working Committee was increased from 181 to 350, on the basis of the new classification under the amended constitution, the Presidency of Madras was allotted 69\*. A 15 Member Working Committee was appointed which included the Secretaries, the Treasurers and the President.

Even before the Non-Co-operation Movement picked up, every district in the Presidency had one or more Congress Committees while in some districts there were Committees for taluks and firkas. In some of the Andhra districts, the organisation extended even to individual villages as in the case of some of the Northern Circars where there were many Village Sabhas.

The main resolution of this session was devoted to non-co-operation. While reaffirming the resolution passed at the Calcutta Special Congress in September 1920, it was further resolved that the “entire or part or parts of the Scheme of the Non-violent Non-Co-operation with the renunciation of voluntary association with the present Government at the one end and the refusal to pay taxes at the other, should be put into force at a time to be determined by either the Congress or the AICC and that in the meanwhile, to prepare the country for it, effective steps should be taken in that behalf. . . .”

This Congress congratulated the nation on the progress already made in the Non-Co-operation Movement, especially in regard to the boycott of Councils by the voters. It expressed its further hope that those who allowed themselves to be elected despite the deliberate abstention from the polls of an overwhelming majority of their constituents, would find their way to resign their seats in the Councils; if they retained their seats disregarding the declared wish of their respective constituencies in direct negation of the principles of democracy, the electors would refrain from asking for any service from such political Councillors. The Congress also praised the police and the soldiers on their “growing friendliness” with the people. Non-violence was made an integral part of the non-co-operation resolution.

This Congress also resolved to wind up the British Committee of the Congress in England. As the Freedom Movement took shape Indian leaders tried to carry on propaganda in England in order to convince the British public of the righteousness of the Indian cause.

\* Madras 25; Andhra 20; Carnataka 16; and Kerala 8.



This was done in the hope that fair dealing would follow this conviction. But when the expected change did not happen and only “revulsion followed”,<sup>78</sup> it was decided not to prolong its existence. The Nagpur Congress wound up both the British Committee of the Congress and the weekly newspaper *India* and practically declared itself against all propaganda in England. Accordingly it was wound up in 1921.

Among the other resolutions, mention may be made of the following: The Hindu delegates were called upon to settle all disputes between Brahmans and non-Brahmans wherever they might be existing and make a special effort to rid Hinduism of the reproach of untouchability; three General Secretaries were appointed for the year 1921 of whom Rajaji was one\*; the country was called upon to refrain from participating in functions got up in honour of the Duke of Connaught during his visit to India; Princely States were requested to establish forthwith full Responsible Government in their States; the Esher Committee recommendations were condemned as they would only aggravate “India’s subservience and impotence constituting an additional ground for non-co-operation”; and the Muslims were thanked for their resolution on cow-slaughter. After this Session, the *Khilafat* issue was merged into the Non-co-operation Movement.

The Nationalists of the Madras Presidency hailed the Nagpur resolution on non-co-operation as a notable landmark in the history of the Indian National Congress. Leading public bodies of the Presidency like the Madras Mahajana Sabha accepted by a large majority the creed of the Congress as adopted at the Nagpur session. This sudden change in the Nationalists who accepted the entire programme of non-co-operation puzzled many. It was incomprehensible to the non-Nationalists as to how these men who bravely fought against the boycott of the Councils in open Congress calling it an “act of political suicide”, changed their attitude overnight, proclaimed their withdrawal from elections and began once again to talk and write “glibly on non-co-operation”. G. A. Natesan, till then a bosom companion of the Mahatma, wrote: “And this *Volte-face* we are told is in the name of the solidarity of the Congress; and surely one would expect them to realise in the name of common sense that the country was undoubtedly greater than the Congress itself. . . . It (non-co-operation) is a perilous policy to

\* The other two were Motilal Nehru and Ansari.

which the Congress has committed the country: and Congress or no Congress, it is the duty of all who disapprove of this movement to protest and work against it".<sup>79</sup> Because Natesan was strongly opposed to non-co-operation, Gandhiji, who always stayed with him whenever he visited Madras, chose not to do so when he went to Madras in April 1921. Gandhiji wrote to Natesan: "I may neither put the strain on you of all the non-co-operators, real or so-called, flooding your house or on them of having to come to your house to freely discuss things they know are distasteful to you".<sup>80</sup>

What impelled the Madras Nationalists to review their decision on non-co-operation? *Gandhiji's charisma pure and simple*. The union of hearts which marked the proceedings of this remarkable session astonished even the Government. In view of the protests of many who had hitherto represented the front rank of "Extremist" stalwarts, and the resignation from the Congress of many prominent persons who since the Special September session had found themselves out of harmony with the spirit pervading it, the Government was certain of a cleavage. But Gandhiji had succeeded not only in securing the confirmation of his non-co-operation programme but also in altering the old "creed" of Congress in such a fashion as to do away with the declared adherence of that great body to the British connection and to constitutional methods of agitation.

### *Verbal Battle:*

A good deal of thrusts and counter thrusts raged on between the leader of the Nationalists and the Moderates of the Madras Presidency in the wake of the Nagpur Congress. Even at this distance of time this war of words would make interesting reading as the parties involved represented the cream of the Presidency's, nay, India's intellect. In this verbal war, Kasturiranga Iyengar who possessed his most powerful weapon in his own paper *The Hindu*, always gained the upper hand. In fact, the Moderates themselves had long regretted the absence of a good moderate organ among the Madras dailies.<sup>81</sup>

*The Hindu* began the verbal war giving lashing replies to the Cassandras who forecast the demise of the Congress in Madras. The Moderates were the main target of its attacks some of which were too harsh. Here are some samples:



By the side of the Congress movement, party organisations such as the Moderate Conference meeting under the “grandiloquent name of National Liberal Federation are like a rush light before the blazing sun”.<sup>82</sup> This had reference to the celebration by the Moderates of the third anniversary of the Liberal party with C. Y. Chintamani in the Chair. It was held at the Gokhale Hall in Madras exactly when the Congress met at Nagpur.

The Moderates were “Moderate only in patriotism”.

“It is not without significance that while the Congress ‘demands’, the Liberal Federation ‘urges’, ‘requests’, ‘recommends’ and ‘considers’. The latter indicates a mentality essentially servile and if to repudiate that mentality is a disservice, then the country can easily put up with a few more such disservices. . . . Moderatism is not a policy but a disease. . . .”<sup>83</sup>

*The Hindu* had many more brushes with some of the prominent Moderates particularly V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, to whom it reserved some of its virulent attacks. In such wars of words, the nationalist organ always emerged out triumphant, as the Moderates were not always prompt in their replies to attacks on them. During these years, the idea was strong in Madras that the Moderate party was too cowardly and nervous and took the attacks of the “Extremists” lying down. This was because they themselves felt they had “no defence and were a rotten set”. When in a leading article, *The Hindu* charged V. S. Srinivasa Sastri with want of faith in democracy, the latter wrote that though he was quite a match to *The Hindu* in mere reasoning, he had not cultivated the art of attack to an equal extent.<sup>84</sup> Even Sivaswamy Iyer, the “meekest of men” advised Sastri that he ought to be a hundred times more militant taking the offensive and seeking every opportunity of exposing the Nationalists’ “tactics, inconsistencies and hypocrisies”.<sup>85</sup>

*The Hindu* once called Sastri an “official apologist” and said that a person of such a temperament could not be a democrat. Sastri repudiated this with “much warmth” when he wrote to *The Hindu*: “In controversy it is a common trick to fling an odious epithet at your adversary. Lampoonists and other reputation killers know that it will stick even when the victim has completely vindicated himself. Such is the power of a witty or sharp pointed phrase. It is good to remember this for you and me and the public as well”.<sup>86</sup>

Soon after this remonstrance, speaking in Tamil at a public meeting in Tanjore on 31 July 1920, Sastri inadvertently remarked

that the creed of the Congressmen and Nationalists was bomb-throwing. *The Hindu* hit back: "Did Mr. Sastri remember his own remarks when he stated that bomb-throwing forms part of the Nationalists' programme? We should have deemed such a vile and scandalous statement proceeding from any responsible person as incredible but for the fact that it is vouched for by reliable correspondents".<sup>87</sup> Sastri expressed regret the moment the grievous imputation which his statement carried was pointed out to him after the meeting. He tendered an unconditional apology when he wrote: "... It is a pity I was not interrupted when I made the unjust criticism as I was interrupted at several other points. Else I should have unhesitatingly apologised then and there".<sup>88</sup> *The Hindu* closed the matter with the remark that such "slips of the tongue" by one of Sastri's calibre were "apt to have more serious consequences than the indiscretion of less responsible persons".<sup>89</sup>

The most caustic comment emanated from *The Hindu* in March 1921 when Sastri was nominated as India's delegate to the Imperial Conference. It called him the "pet lamb of the British Government" who had an amazing capacity for accommodation which had already earned him so many laurels and "threatens so many more". Congratulating him on his "genius for surrender" it made the extravagant statement: "It is necessary for public opinion to make itself felt with no uncertain voice and demonstrate that Mr. Sastri, repudiated in Madras by the non-Brahmans and by the vast mass of public opinion here and elsewhere, is the nominee of the bureaucracy and represents nobody but himself on that august body".<sup>90</sup>

It requires to be mentioned here that Sastri was insulted and howled down at public meetings in Poona, Bombay and other places. The fact that he believed in co-operation with the Government did not mean that he was less of a patriot. Sastri was among the ablest and most public-spirited men in the country. Even after the great split in the Congress when the Liberals had seceded he did not hesitate to condemn the misdeeds of the Government. His resolution on the Punjab massacre is a case in point. He sent notice of a resolution asking for deterrent punishment on the Punjab official miscreants and forbidding pension, gratuity or allowances to any of those villains from the Indian funds. He said that if the resolution was disallowed or the "scoundrels" let off lightly "We must do something out of the way. . . . My idea is to cut off social relations with all the councillors and the Viceroy and refuse even



tea and let it become known to the public. I do not want to yield to the cry of resignation and boycott as they will afterwards expect us to do such a thing on all occasions".<sup>91</sup>

Sastri detested the Non-Co-operation Movement. He sincerely believed that Gandhiji, whom he revered as "a great man", was "running amok". He did not accuse him of vanity or wantonness or mischief. His anguish was that between Gandhiji and the Government "the country bleeds and suffers and loses". He wrote that Gandhiji was "a colossus playing on a vast stage with vast issues. Every nod, every movement of his produces vast consequences. A mistake on his part is necessarily an unspeakable calamity. And he is hugely irredeemably mistaken. Woe to India".<sup>92</sup>

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## CHAPTER NINE

# Non-Co-operation Movement: The Consummation

The Nagpur session of the Congress witnessed the birth of the Non-co-operation Movement, a brainchild of Gandhiji. The Movement had a special significance for the politics of the Madras Presidency. There was outright opposition to it from the Madras Nationalists when the subject of non-co-operation was mooted. This afforded a chance for the anti-Congress elements to happily prophesy one more schism and secession in the Congress. Thanks to the charisma of Mahatma Gandhi those who went to the Nagpur Congress to oppose the non-co-operation programme found themselves supporting it wholeheartedly. The Presidency witnessed an unexpected resurgence of the nationalist spirit.

### *The first shot:*

The very first demonstration of the Non-co-operation Movement as resolved at the Nagpur Congress was the boycott of the Duke of Connaught who visited India in 1921. It was not without significance that Madras was chosen by the officialdom as the first landing stage of the Duke of Connaught in preference to Bombay. His Royal Highness was sent by the British Government on an official mission to inaugurate the Montford Reforms in the name of His Majesty the King. The British bureaucracy was sanguine that there would be no untoward incident in Madras which was much divided against itself by inter-caste jealousies. But their calculations misfired. The intense agitation which Madras had kept up almost from the beginning of January 1921 to boycott the Duke's State entry into Madras served as an eye-opener to the officialdom which mis-reckoned Madras as docile and meek.

Street corner meetings were arranged where Nationalist leaders took pains to explain to the masses that the boycott of the Duke did not mean any disloyalty to the throne or disrespect to the Duke.



It was disloyalty to the Government of the day and not to the person of the Duke. Leaflets were distributed urging people to boycott Connaught. Presiding over a mammoth public meeting on 5 January 1921, Kasturiranga Iyengar explained fully to the vast gathering the resolutions of the Nagpur Congress. The meeting adopted the following resolution: "This meeting of the citizens of Madras calls upon the people of this city not to take part in any of the functions and festivities arranged in honour of HRH the Duke of Connaught's visit".<sup>1</sup>

Processions were organised throughout the week. Some of them covered half a mile in length, carrying the Congress message of non-violence and advocating boycott and *hartal* on the day of the Duke's landing in Madras. In all the roads through which the Duke was expected to pass, big placards carrying such inscriptions as "boycott Connaught", "Connaught cannot redress our wrongs", "Remember Jallianwalabagh" etc. etc were displayed. Students also came out in large numbers to join the procession.<sup>2</sup>

When the Duke landed in Madras at 10.30 a.m. on 10 January 1921, the Governor and his staff, Ministers, Members of the Legislative Council and other high officials received him at a spacious platform erected for this purpose. After the customary exchange of greetings, the Duke received the address of welcome presented by the President of the Madras Municipal Corporation. This address, which kept clear of local topics, gave an overwhelming expression to the sense of loyalty that the Corporation felt towards the royalty. The Duke in his reply profusely acknowledged the sacrifices of the Indian soldiers during the War. Said he, "As a soldier, they were true to their salt and as a soldier I pay them the honour which is their due". He referred to the abiding love of his mother Queen Victoria for India which was standing on the threshold of a new era. Speaking briefly about the "anarchy and unspeakable distress" India had just then passed through, he advised her people not to brood over those tragedies, but to feel grateful that things had not been "worse, infinitely worse". His appeal to the citizens of Madras, which of course was meant for the whole of India, had been: "Do not peer into the troubled waters in the wake of your ship. Lengthen the focus of your glasses and look ahead".<sup>3</sup>

The civic ceremony went on in typical "oriental splendour" in one part of the Beach. At another part, a huge concourse of non-co-operators numbering easily more than half a lakh had gathered to say that they did not associate themselves with the

sentiment which was being given expression to at the other end of the Beach. Inaugurating the meeting K.P. Kesava Menon\*, the non-co-operation leader, said: The address that was being read at that very moment at the other meeting was done in the name of the people of the Madras Presidency. Since the individual responsible for it had no right to speak on their behalf, it behoved them to reassert that they would accord no welcome whatever to anybody who came in the name of England. The meeting passed unanimously the following resolution: "As in the opinion of this meeting of the citizens of Madras, the existing government of India has forfeited the confidence of the country, and as the people of India are now determined to establish *Swaraj* and as all methods adopted by them hitherto have failed to secure the recognition of their rights and principles and the redress of their many grievous wrongs, more especially in reference to the *Khilafat* and the Punjab and as this meeting considers that the Government of India Act which His Highness the Duke of Connaught has come to put into operation is of no value whatsoever to the people and that the Councils do not represent the country, this meeting therefore confirms its determination to secure *Swaraj* by the method of non-violent non-co-operation resolved upon by the Indian National Congress at Nagpur".<sup>4</sup>

Many prominent non-co-operators of the Presidency like T.S.S. Rajan, Kasturiranga Iyengar, Hari Sarvothama Rao, Krishnaswamy Chetty, Appu Nair, T. Prakasam, Gopala Menon, N.S. Varadachari, V. Gopalaswamy Mudaliar, Balasubrahmanya Iyer, S. Doraiswamy Iyer and K.V. Srinivasa Iyengar who spoke at the meeting referred to the painful situation in which Indians tyrannised their own countrymen to please the aliens who kept them in subjection. T. Prakasam who concluded the proceedings wondered, pointing to the aeroplane that was just then flying over heads, whether a "repetition of the Jallianwalabagh was not going to be perpetrated as we too are an unarmed people".<sup>5</sup>

On the eve of the Duke's arrival in Madras, the newspapers carried an astounding message to the effect that HRH would give no preferential treatment to Englishmen. Before the people could recover from their stupefaction caused by such a gracious message, they were greeted by the distressing tidings of the in-

\* As Secretary of the Kerala District Congress Committee, he played a commendable role in the Vaikom Satyagraha.



solent behaviour of an English Sergeant towards a High Court Judge who was an Indian. On the plea of rehearsing the Duke's procession, without any prior notice whatever, the military helped by the police suddenly stopped traffic in some streets during office hours, causing avoidable inconvenience to the public. Justice Sadasiva Iyer, who was held up, got off his vehicle to enquire of the English sergeant posted there, the sources from which such an order had emanated. The latter told the Judge with an "exasperating hauteur" that it was *his* order and that *he* would stop the interrogator physically. When a by-stander pointed out that he was addressing a High Court Judge, he answered arrogantly! "I do not care who the d. . . ." By that time the Chief Justice of the High Court, an Englishman, came along the same route to that spot and was "accorded a right royal military salute. His Lordship too was in wrath on being stopped but some European Police officer drew in and whispered explanations".<sup>6</sup>

The Madras Legislative Council was inaugurated on 12 January. Even nature appeared to have co-operated with the non-co-operators on this day. There was a heavy downpour of rain which not only destroyed all costly street decorations but also cancelled the ducal procession arranged. The inaugural speech of the Duke which was painfully plain disillusioned many. He pointed out that the Indians had to be "taught and fitted to govern themselves"; that there was every need for prolonged probation during which they should cherish the growth of constitutional liberty and hand it on to their successors, "a stage further towards perfect maturity"; that, for their political growth, they had to cultivate such virtues as "patience, insight, sympathy . . . (and) charity (which is) that wider toleration which blunts the sharpness of conflicting interests"; that India had long suffered from hard distinctions between social orders which mean "disunion and disunion is weakness. They mean constraint and constraint is unhappiness". This address only confirmed the evaluation of the non-co-operators that a seat in the new Council had no intrinsic value. As the *Hindu* observed: "The more carefully you read the HRH's speech the more are you impressed with the deliberate emphasis it lays on stages and tutelage with the suggestion that the goal is yet distant, beyond and behind the horizon and the journey long and arduous".<sup>7</sup>

In pursuance of the Nagpur resolution, the non-co-operators in Madras carried out the programme effectively. There could be no two opinions about the success of their demonstration. But there-

after it became a habit with the Madras Government either to aver that a particular programme of the Nationalists was a "total failure" when success was moderate, or to accuse them of terrorist leanings by highlighting some stray untoward occurrences if the programme proved a great success. The Government exaggerated the reception accorded to the Duke by the Madras public as a tremendous response. They were right if one took into consideration the number of the people who had thronged wherever the Duke appeared during his one week stay in Madras. But all of them were not loyalists. Nor were they all opposed to non-co-operation. These gatherings no doubt included educated people also. But they were those who hardly ever bothered themselves about the political status of India. If they had participated in the welcome to the Duke, it was purely out of a curious desire to see the royal personage.

The non-co-operators appealed to the Madras public to boycott the Duke totally and completely. But the allegation levelled by Knapp, a member of the Executive Council that the non-co-operators suggested that men should appear without their upper dress and women without jewels and that the labourers should prostrate themselves in front of the Duke's car was the height of gullibility.

The moderates in Madras heaved a sigh of relief when the Duke's visit went off smoothly notwithstanding the unexpected inclemency of the weather and the "unfortunate attempt of the non-co-operators" to boycott him. The Duke's visit cost India Rs. 41.5 lakhs.\*

A word about the Madras constabulary: having their demands for higher wages ignored by the Government on earlier occasions, the constabulary found that the controversial visit of the Duke presented an apposite moment for them to protest. So, to wrest a favourable decision from the Government, the police threatened to strike. The Government was also well aware that the non-co-operation programme included a call for the resignation of Indians from the army and the police and that in response to this call, one Constable and two Sub-Inspectors had resigned. The Government of India itself was alarmed at the prospect of widespread disaffection among the constabulary of several provinces. Sufficiently frightened at the development the Madras Government saw the wisdom of meeting at least some of their demands. Arthur

\*This was Hailey's figure. The Associated Press stated it to be Rs. 19 lakhs which alarmed not a few.



Knapp, the Home Member who was directed to investigate the pay claims of the constabulary in May 1921, submitted his report in November of that year. His recommendations were accepted and were implemented towards the end of March 1921. The constabulary gained a number of concessions including an allowance for the upkeep of their new khaki uniforms.<sup>8</sup>

*The second shot:*

The Prince of Wales\* visited Madras in January 1922 when the Non-Co-operation Movement was in full swing and the local Government's repressive policy in full blast. Just four months prior to the Prince's visit Gandhiji had toured Madras\*\* to explain to the people at large the significance of the non-co-operation pledge. Consequently the entire Presidency was imbued with the spirit of non-co-operation. At the Ahmedabad Congress held subsequently in December 1921 under the guidance of Gandhiji, six thousand delegates endorsed his resolution calling for aggressive civil disobedience to all Government laws and constitutions; for non-violence; for continuance of public meetings throughout India despite the Government prohibition; and for all Indians to offer themselves peacefully for arrest by joining the volunteer corps.<sup>9</sup> At one of the meetings convened under the presidency of Kasturiranga Iyengar, the Madras delegates to the Congress decided, in accordance with the Congress mandate, to call for a complete *hartal* on the day of the Prince's visit to Madras.<sup>10</sup>

The time chosen for the visit of His Royal Highness was indeed most inauspicious and inopportune. The bitter memories of the Mappilla outrage\*\*\* were still green in the memory of the people who were in no mood to receive the Prince. The visit of the Prince had been arranged disregarding the unfavourable situation that prevailed in the Presidency. The motive was therefore political, pure and simple. With the Non-co-operation Movement gaining momentum, there lurked in the British mind the genuine fear that their hold on India was loosening. A goodwill tour undertaken by the Prince of Wales to all major provinces in India would, it was be-

\*Future King Edward VIII who abdicated the throne in favour of his brother George VI.

\*\*It was during this trip while sojourning in Madura on 21 September that Gandhiji discarded his cap and vest and took to loincloth which earned him the name the "Half-naked Fakir".

\*\*\**Infra pp.* 309-12.

lieved, help to resolve the various complicated issues and strengthen their grip over India. It was nothing short of folly to expect of a young Prince, who hardly had any intimate knowledge of the problems of India, to sort out everything in a matter of few days. The visit was planned by both the Indian and the Imperial Governments. The Indian Government was more to be blamed as it ought to have informed the Ministers of His Majesty that it was most inadvisable to send the Prince to India at that time.

Gandhiji reiterated that the Prince's visit was political and not non-political. He announced through the *Madras Mail* that every Indian must boycott the visit of the Prince who was coming to India as the Prime Minister's ambassador. The powers that be were bringing the Prince to India so as to steal through his visit honours and prestige for a Government which least deserved to remain in power. Gandhiji deemed that this act added an insult to injury. He even said that the Indian Government was guilty of a breach of loyalty in "making the Prince a cat's paw of their deep political game".<sup>11</sup>

Even before Gandhiji's visit to Madras in September 1921, Kasturiranga Iyengar had resigned his membership of the Provincial Prince of Wales Entertainment Committee, an official body formed in Madras with the Governor as its President. His resignation letter to Willingdon read thus: "I feel I should not be a member of the same (Committee) and take part in the arrangements relating to the reception of His Royal Highness after the manner in which the House of Lords had adopted Lord Rinlay's motion in the matter of the Punjab massacres and after the expression of similar opinions on the subject by the vast majority of Englishmen and Englishwomen residing in this country.

"I entirely disagree with Mr. Montagu that in his view Gandhiji's proposal not to take part in the reception of the Prince of Wales is a disloyal one, and I feel that the strictures made on Gandhiji by Mr. Montagu and Mr. Sinha in the House of Commons and the House of Lords respectively are wholly unwarranted and unmerited and ought not to have been made".<sup>12</sup>

Elaborate arrangements were made in Madras by the Government for the royal visit. As a precautionary measure towards ensuring a favourable reception to the Prince, the Government extended Part II of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act to Madras. Yet it was professed in some quarters that his visit had no political significance. In spite of the deficit economy occasioned chiefly by



the huge provincial contribution the Presidency of Madras had to make to the centre, the Government budgeted a substantial amount of money to be spent on the royal visit. As the day of the Prince's visit to Madras approached, the Government of Willingdon tried frantically to nullify the efforts of the non-co-operators to organise a *hartal*. The Government received all the assistance it needed from the loyalist Justice Party. Shop-keepers were intimidated into offering a welcome to the Prince.<sup>13</sup>

The nationalist media was as active as that of the Government. Especially the Kannada and Malayalam papers of the Presidency advocated steadily and consistently the launching of the civil disobedience throughout the Presidency to thwart the plans of the Government and to defeat them wherever possible.

The public of Madras proved worthy of the confidence the Congress reposed in them by observing a "completest hartal" on 15 January when the Prince arrived in Madras. As it happened on the earlier occasion of the visit of the Prince's grand uncle to Madras in 1921, a grand reception for and a loud protest against the Prince were taking place simultaneously in one and the same place—the Marina Beach. The former, which was an impressive display of enthusiastic loyalty, was attended by the Europeans, the Anglo-Indians, the Rajahs and *Zamindars*, members of the Justice Party and the Adi-Dravidas. The latter represented the non-co-operators who were drawn from all communities. It was a peaceful *hartal* in obedience to Congress mandate and the behaviour of the non-co-operators in carrying out the protest "exceeded all popular expectations". Even petty bazaars in the remotest parts of the city were closed.<sup>14</sup>

There were disturbances and untoward incidents but they were few and far between. They were of a minor nature compared to the "extensive and murderous riots" in Bombay during the Prince's visit. As usual, the unquiet situation was exploited by anti-social elements who hooted, hissed and pelted stones at the loyalists. In George Town, Triplicane, Mount Road and the area near the Pachaiyappa's College in Kilpauk, there were clashes between the loyalists and hooligans, the latter going on a rampage. There were looting and arson. Onslaught was made on two cinema theatres in Mount Road, one of the principal thoroughfares of the city. The Parsi cinema house "Wellington" was damaged beyond recognition. Sighting a threatening crowd in front of the cinema, a Parsi fired from upstairs at the crowd. One member of the crowd died on

the spot and two others were injured. The excited crowd broke into the theatre and smashed window panes and furniture.<sup>15</sup> Even the films in the store room were brought out and burnt. Pedestrians were molested, motor cars were stopped and public streets were barricaded by filthy dust bins. As a consequence many were not allowed to join the ceremonial welcome to the Prince. P. T. Chetty was besieged in his own house by the crowd and could not attend the Council on 15 January 1922 when the Prince came\*. Nothing, however, happened to his person. Their wrath against P. T. Chetty was on account of his spending quietly a great deal of money for enrolling a force of loyalists in each street to keep an eye on the demonstrators and to assist the police. Trains were blocked and their inmates pelted with stones. Some girl guides and lady students travelling in them were spat at, abused in the most violent and vile language, and were molested.<sup>16</sup> The army was called in to help the civil police in combating the forces of outlawry. Quiet was not restored until 3 p.m; by then two rioters had been killed and two wounded by gunfire.<sup>17</sup>

The non-co-operators were upset over these unhappy incidents in some parts of the city. The nationalist organs deplored the rowdyism that had no connection whatever with the *hartal* which was pronounced to be a "signal success". Whoever had been the miscreants, the general impression was that the non-co-operators played the vandals. The official reports highlighted only the acts of hooliganism, accusing the non-co-operators of setting up rowdies to cause disturbances. They declared that the events of the day had contributed a good deal to discredit the non-co-operators in Madras. One of them stated: "As a result of this rowdyism the outward appearance of a complete *hartal* was obtained. In the earlier hours of the morning it was only partial though the non-co-operators had made every effort by persuasion and, according to common report, by threats in many places to ensure that all shops and bazaars were shut. The police strike in Madras did not materialise".<sup>18</sup> The last statement was a reference to the strike threat given by the constabulary. But it was called off because, frightened of the

\* Highly influential that he was, Chetty had succeeded in getting the Governor arrange for the visit of the Prince of Wales to the Cosmopolitan Club during his visit to Madras. He wanted the function to be very grand and wrote confidentially to his wealthy friends including the Moderates, to send handsome contributions towards it. (His letter to P. S. Sivaswamy Iyer, 19 June 1920, *Sivaswamy Iyer Papers*).



consequences of police discontent at the time of the Prince's visit, the Government conceded their material needs. After the visit of the Duke of Connaught the constabulary found that any disaffection among them at critical hours terrified the Government into conceding at least part of their demands. In January 1922 the city constables just repeated their threat to go on a strike which would coincide with the Congress boycott of the Prince of Wales. They duly won some concessions.<sup>19</sup> However, their decision not to strike was no defeat to the non-co-operators.

Gandhiji was much distressed over the hooliganism in Madras on the day of the *hartal* which he said was "complete proof of non-co-operators' unfitness for self-government in Madras". According to him non-co-operators had to have the capacity to control all forces of violence. The unfortunate happenings in Madras proved that they had still much work to do before they could really establish a *Swaraj* atmosphere. He confessed that the requisite atmosphere could be reached only "when we have eradicated violence from our thoughts".<sup>20</sup> After the repetition in Madras of the disgraceful scenes first enacted in Bombay, Gandhiji was anxious that non-co-operation should not become a "byword for execration and reproach".<sup>21</sup>

The boycott of the Prince in Madras caused a flutter in the far off England where even the "man-in-the-street" who normally knew and cared very little about Indian politics deeply resented it.<sup>22</sup>

Two impartial British journalists commenting on the Prince's tour observed that scarcely anyone in India wished the Prince to come. Neither the army nor the civil service outside Simla, nor the merchants, nor even the Native Rulers who had hardly recovered from the financial strain caused by the visit of the Duke of Connaught, nor the Indians, whether friendly or hostile to the Government, nor the people desired his visit.<sup>23</sup> In fine, the general feeling in the Presidency was that the Prince was forced upon a nation much against its will at a time of great distress. *The Hindu* wrote: "If the visit of the Prince to this land needs a memorial, on it will be writ large the words: He came, he saw and he went".<sup>24</sup>

#### *Non-co-operation in Andhra:*

Many areas in the Presidency of Madras were the major theatres of the Non-co-operation Movement. Nevertheless, Andhra was a

pioneer not only within the Madras Presidency but in the whole of the nation in this Movement. Soon after the Nagpur Congress, the Andhra Nationalists meeting at Vijayawada in January 1921 decided to organise Congress committees at the district, taluk and village levels to effectively implement the programme. While such aspects of non-co-operation as surrendering titles, boycotting councils, courts, schools and foreign goods, picketing of liquor shops etc. were carried on throughout the Presidency in the urban areas, the peasant movements were concentrated significantly in the rural Andhra. Their achievements in this field were unique considering the fact that the Congress did not directly involve itself in them. The No-Tax campaign, for instance, had begun in Andhra region even before the deadline set by Gandhiji for inaugurating the same, namely, 31 January 1922.

In some centres of Andhra, the Movement was the most intense. The districts of Godavari, Krishna and Guntur stood foremost in the whole Presidency of Madras in carrying out the constructive items in the programme of non-co-operation. The people of these parts had no doubt that the Movement launched by the man venerated as semi-divine was one of purification. They had set their hearts on following in the footsteps of the Mahatma and in doing their best to help him end *Ravanarajya* and establish *Ramarajya*. Struck by the initiative taken and the sacrifices made by the Andhra Nationalists even Gandhiji who was over cautious in bestowing praise paid them high tributes. During his visits to the Andhra districts, he was all admiration for the functioning of the *Andhra Jateeya Kalasala*\* (Andhra National College) in Masulipatam; the spinning of beautiful yarn by the village women of Masulipatam who did it out of love and not for money;<sup>25</sup> the praiseworthy contribution of the Andhra women to the *Tilak Swaraj Fund*,\*\* the proceeds of which were intended to introduce spinning Wheel into every home in India; the spirit of non-violence displayed by the women of Chirala who deputed at least one lady to courageously court arrest along with eleven other patriots;<sup>26</sup> and the great enthusiasm for the Movement evinced by the pupils of the *Tilak*

\* Duggirala Gopalakrishnayya, an Edinburgh product, prominent speaker and great patriot joined it in 1918-19. Later he started his own association — the *Andhra Vidya Peetha Goshti* in 1920.

\*\* The share of Andhra was Rupees seven lakhs and a half out of a total of one crore of rupees.



*Jateeya Vidyalaya* (Tilak National School) at Nellore, who had the night previous to Gandhiji's visit on 7 April 1921, spun two fine pieces of cloth.<sup>27</sup>

Complementing the Andhra districts of the Presidency whose agitation had captivated him, Gandhiji said that Andhra had "hardy, staunch workers. It has sources, it has poetry, it has faith, it has the spirit of sacrifice. It has many national schools, it has given many lawyers to the cause, it has the greatest possibilities in hand-spinning and hand-weaving and grows fine cotton. My conviction remains that even if the so-called major provinces fall, in the event of terrorism (as distinguished from repression) commencing, Bihar and Andhra will save the situation by outdoing the Sikhs in the bravery of the soul, i.e., suffering. . . ."<sup>28</sup>

#### *Exodus to Ramnagar:*

Throughout the period when the Non-co-operation Movement was active, there existed in many parts of Andhra a general restiveness of the population under some form of unpopular or enhanced taxation. The result was a large number of *hartals* or other demonstrations. While this was common in most parts, the happenings in Chirala-Perala in the Bapatla *taluk* of the Guntur district stood distinct. Chirala was a union comprising 5 villages—Chirala, Veeraraghavapatta, Jaundrapetta, Peddachirala and Perala. It was always called Chirala-Perala. The area was not far removed from the sea and had a population of about 15,000.

Under the reformed constitution, Municipal Government became a *Transferred* subject. The Chief Minister, the Raja of Panagal, who held the portfolio of Local Administration, had been endeavouring to foist a Municipality on these people against their unanimous opposition to it. The latter apprehended a consequent increase in their burden of taxation from Rs. 4000 to Rs. 40,000 with no corresponding benefits. The lot of 90 per cent of the population in Chirala which lived on weaving and dyeing was already deplorable. Their industry had to face stiff competition from the cheap cotton piecegoods imported not only from European countries but also from China and Japan. Now to add insult to injury, increased tax was imposed on them by the Municipality. Permeated by the spirit of non-co-operation, the people were out to resist this economic injustice. But the adamant Minister imposed on them a vexatious trading licence as a preliminary measure. The real motive

behind this imposition was that the people of this area were staunch supporters of non-co-operation which had to be discouraged. Chirala returned an empty ballot box during the elections in 1920.<sup>29</sup>

The Chiralites resisted the Minister's act by trading without licence. Their leader Duggirala Gopalakrishnayya, a sturdy patriot popularly known as *Andhra Ratna*, declared that the Municipality contemplated was the outcome of the "unholy alliance of the *Abrahmana* and the *Angleya*, that is, the Justice Party and the English".<sup>30</sup> Disregarding all protests, a Municipality was imposed on Chirala-Perala although there was absolutely no need for it. Establishment of a Municipality did not mean better sanitation for the people of Chirala-Perala who had been keeping the area unusually clean; nor did it mean more education for its people who were all non-co-operators. Another Municipality was instituted in Repalle union. In both cases, the ostensible reason for establishing the Municipality was a paramount consideration of health: there was plague in both places and so the Sanitary Commissioner had recommended the establishment of Municipality in both unions.<sup>31</sup>

In setting up and continuing the Municipality at Chirala-Perala, the Government committed a series of blunders: while converting the union of Chirala into a Municipality, it exempted two villages, namely Jaundrapetta and Peddachirala from its jurisdiction. The reason was—there were a mission hospital and school in those villages and so the mission lady doctor of Jaundrapetta did not desire to come under the purview of a municipality. Bapatla, a place bigger than Chirala and a *taluk* had no municipality. Another bigger union, Ponnur, also remained only a union. When the attention of the Chief Minister was drawn to these anomalies, he said that Bapatla was less populous and less important.<sup>32</sup> Sometime after its establishment, the Municipality at Repalle was withdrawn on the recommendations of the Minister but not in Chirala. When this was questioned, the Government cleverly justified its stand thus: Chirala being a big mercantile and weaving centre, almost a "second Bombay" in India for about forty years then, had to be well protected against plague; yarn and thread had to be got from distant places like Bombay and Hyderabad where plague prevailed; and rats, carriers of the disease, being fond of yarn and cloth would bring the killer disease to Chirala-Perala!<sup>33</sup> Granting this was the case, why did not the authorities cherish the idea of setting up a Municipality there during the forty years? Why did they choose the year 1919/20? This point was never answered. The authorities, however, succeeded in setting afloat this rumour: the place was a



stronghold of the Non-co-operation Movement thanks to caste affinity. It was made out that the strongest support Gandhiji got in the Northern Circars came mostly from the majority of the Vaisya caste to which he himself belonged and that those of the Chirala union who considered themselves to be closely related to him followed Gandhiji "implicitly and almost blindly".<sup>34</sup>

A resolution was moved in the Legislative Council in 1921 recommending the abolition of the Municipality in Chirala-Perala and the constitution of the area into suitable Unions. But it was lost with 17 voting for and 63 against it.<sup>35</sup> It was obvious that the imposition of the unwanted Municipality on Chirala had a two fold evil objective: more taxation and more interference with the liberty of the inhabitants. When ten out of the twelve Councillors resigned bringing the municipal administration to a standstill, the Raja of Panagal, Minister for Local Self Government, generously offered to exempt agricultural cattle and land from municipal taxation. But the Chiralites who were made of sterner stuff rejected the offer.<sup>36</sup> Therefore the Government superseded the Council for one year from 1 April 1921 and appointed a paid officer to discharge the duties of the council and its chairman. On the expiry of the period of supersession, the Municipal Council was reconstituted under section 41(4) of the District Municipalities Act.<sup>37</sup>

The Chiralites decided not to accept the unwanted Municipality. To carry it out they had either to offer non-co-operation with civil disobedience or to perform *hijrat* as the Muslim would call it or *desatyag* as Tulasidas would say.<sup>38</sup> The Chiralites preferred the last alternative of leaving the precincts of the Municipality and living outside. The sequel was a mass exodus under the captaincy of Gopalakrishnayya. Gopalakrishnayya, noted for his high literary attainments, was a typical product of the Andhra renaissance. His services to the Chirala townsfolk and to the ryots of the district during these dark days of repression were highly commended by Gandhiji in all his speeches and writings. The Chiralites under his lead, repaired in April 1921 to a bare place of ground nearby, but outside the Municipal limits called Ramnagar, where an *ashram* was founded. Gopalakrishnayya organised a voluntary army — *Rama Dandu* ("Sri Rama's Army") which played a remarkable role in bringing the people and their belongings to Ramnagar peacefully. Aside from constituting the police force of the township, the *Rama Dandu* also assisted in constructing sheds for the evacuees to settle, in digging wells and in a host of similar things. A *Panchayat* was also established with legislative, executive and judicial powers.<sup>39</sup>

In fine, Gopalakrishnayya had virtually set up a parallel Government at Ramnagar. The Chirala-Perala satyagrahis exhibited remarkable degree of cohesion, courage and capability for daring leadership. They did so in spite of the warning made repeatedly by Gandhiji that he could never advise the Congress or the public to give them any encouragement or pecuniary aid. He also said bluntly that if their satyagraha worked, the Congress would claim the credit for the success but if they failed the Congress would have no share of the discredit.

However, what could they do against a Government or a powerful Minister out to undo their work? With the assistance of the Revenue Department, the Minister levied penal cesses in respect of the sheds on the plea that they were erected on Government waste. The rate for each shed was Rs.10-2-6 whereas the value thereof was only Rs.25. Failure to pay would lead to eviction. According to the Andhra Provincial Congress Committee, in spite of the repression and other serious hardships inflicted by the Government, the Chiralites carried the No-tax campaign with remarkable vigour and persistence. The property of those convicted were attached and brought to sale a number of times at Bapatla and at Guntur for realising the amount of the fines levied on them. But no bidders came forward in either place.<sup>40</sup> Was this not an eloquent testimony to the sympathy felt generally for the sufferings of the Chirala-Perala patriots who dared to challenge the Government to do its worst and refused to have a Municipality?

The brave people carried on their organised agitation against the continuance of the Municipality even after the incarceration of Gopalakrishnayya. He was arrested for his speeches and writings which were not violent at all. His was really a restraining influence in the face of grave provocation. It is true that an excessively cruel and vindictive Government ultimately scored over the helpless, leaderless people who could not but reconcile themselves to the setting up of the Municipality. But it is wrong to suggest on this score that they had not developed that deep sense of discipline required to persist in their agitation even in the absence of their leader. The Chirala people had suffered much and suffered long. Their exodus to Ramnagar is "an unparalleled incident in the whole history of India's struggle for freedom, it being the closest approximation to Gandhi's concept of a non-violent mass campaign against an unjust Government".<sup>41</sup> Gandhiji's utterances in Chirala bear ample evidence to the immense faith he had in the patriotic fervour



of the people of these districts. He said, "I shall follow the career of the men and women of Chirala with reverence. . . ." However, he made it clear that the responsibility for the activities of the people was entirely theirs. Advising them to cheerfully allow the Government to inflict on them any penalty it deemed fit, he said: "By their meek and unyielding suffering they will cover themselves and India with glory and will give an object lesson to the country in non-violence."<sup>42</sup>

Mention may be made of the special appeal Gandhiji made to the women of these areas as part of the non-co-operation campaign. Referring to the visit of some dancing girls at Cocanada he asked the womenfolk of Chirala to go from place to place in search of every dancing girl and "shame the men into shunning the wrong they are doing". He even exhorted them to discard all their fine garments and ornaments for the protection of the dancing girls.<sup>43</sup>

Next to Chirala-Perala, Repalle took a similar move but of a less intense nature. Repalle was constituted a Municipality from 1 September 1920 with a strength of twelve Councillors nominated by the Government. In January 1920, eight of the Councillors sent a requisition to the *ex-officio* chairman to convene a meeting to consider the abolition of the Municipality and to suspend the collection of Municipal taxes pending receipt of orders on their memorials to the Governor on the subject. But the chairman did not convene the meeting. Thereupon the people refused to receive tax notices. Cart drivers and Jutkawallahs went on a strike. The Government concluded that this move was bolstered up by the non-co-operators outside, especially Guntur and Tenali. Anyway, it ordered that no Municipal tax should be levied on lands used solely for agricultural purposes and that cattle should be exempt from tolls and taxes. The Minister for Local Self-Government who visited the place in September 1921, abolished the Municipality on the plea that there was no indication of early development of Repalle into a town.<sup>44</sup> The grievances of the people in Vijayawada and Berhampur were also connected with their respective Municipal administrations. They also threatened to withhold payment of taxes. But the agitations in these places were short-lived as the Government obliged to concede their demands.

Another form of attack of the non-co-operators on local administration consisted in capturing the Municipalities and in putting into practice the doctrine of non-co-operation in respect of schools, liquor shops etc. They succeeded in scoring a majority on many of

the Municipalities and a few local boards. Their chief concern was to prevent the location of liquor shops within the limits of the Municipality. They were very keen on maintaining the records of the Municipality in the vernacular language.

Guntur Municipality took the lead in the Movement. In fact, it was the only Municipality to resolve to nationalise all Municipal schools, to reject Government grants for educational purpose and to raise a loan from the people. This Municipality also resolved to reduce the rate of house-tax. But the Government did not sanction it and for long the tax remained uncollected.<sup>45</sup>

*No-Tax campaign in Peddanandipadu:*

The centre of all activities in Guntur district during the Non-co-operation Movement was the *Firka* of Peddanandipadu in the Bapatla *taluk*, lying about 15 miles from Guntur town. Vigorous preparations for a mass Civil Disobedience Movement became complete in this area by January 1922. Its inhabitants had developed very definite views about the entire programme of non-co-operation and particularly about the non-payment of taxes. Their participation in the non-co-operation meetings had naturally given them the necessary stimulus to conform rigidly to all the items in Gandhiji's programme. They began to take to *Khadar* even before it was insisted upon by the Indian National Congress. They were fully prepared to make any sacrifice in the cause of the great movement. When the *kists* to be paid by them to the Government fell due on 10 January 1922, the ryots of the area seized the opportunity to demonstrate their fitness to go to the full extent of the non-co-operation programme by withholding payment. This apart, the village officers such as *munsifs* and *karnams* of the 20 villages comprising this *Firka* and of the 30 villages surrounding it, tendered their resignations from these offices. But peace was preserved throughout by the 3000 odd members of the Congress Sabha which each village had. They observed perfect non-violence in spite of the provocation given by the military drafted there through attachment of carts and bulls and distraint of other movable properties.<sup>46</sup>

The campaigners' determination to suffer the consequences of their acts at the hands of the authorities without protest perturbed the Madras Government. The Government proclaimed that both the concerted move to refuse payment of taxes and the resignations of the Village Officers, were parts of a general plan designed to



embarrass and eventually subvert the Government. So it took counter measures. It issued a press *communique* announcing emergency legislation to amend the Madras Revenue Recovery Act and special executive arrangements. The proposed legislation would shorten, where necessary, the time taken to carry out the various provisions of the Revenue Recovery Act II of 1864, so that land or movable property might be brought to sale immediately on failure of payment. Where the land was bought by the Government, thanks to a boycott of the bidding by the villagers, the pieces of land seized would be assigned to members of the depressed classes.<sup>47</sup>

Three weeks later, i.e., in February 1922, the Revenue member Habib-ul-lah moved that the bill to amend the Madras Revenue Recovery Act II of 1864 be passed into law. He tried to impress upon the House that this piece of legislation was of an emergent nature needed to meet the intransigent civil resisters. Prominent among those who opposed the legislation was L. A. Govindaraghava Iyer who said that the legislation was either a punitive measure or one intended to protect the revenue or it partook the nature of both. The resolution was carried.<sup>48</sup>

With regard to the Village Officers, the Government decided not to accept their resignations. If the officers refused to carry out their duties, they would be dismissed. Steps would be taken to ensure protection to the substitutes appointed in the place of the Village Officers and also to the agency employed to collect the taxes. The Government also contemplated introducing a legislation to deprive permanently the families of the Village Officers dismissed for disloyalty, of their hereditary rights. It was further announced that under the provisions of section 15 of Act V of 1861, extra police would be employed at the expense of the inhabitants of the Firka. These measures were soon translated into action. When it was announced that the Collectors could not succeed in collecting an "appreciable amount", the Government resorted to distraint and attachment of property in certain cases of non-payment of taxes. Troops were stationed at Guntur to march through the affected areas and armoured cars were sent to patrol and visit the areas and towns on the sides of the main roads.<sup>49</sup> Later the Government of India also sent armoured cars and a company of Indian Infantry to Guntur to help the Government of Madras to meet the situation. The Government of India advised the Madras Government to give the widest possible publicity to the occurrences in Guntur illustrating the consequences and dangers of civil disobedience.<sup>50</sup>

Many arrests were made. Some of the Village Officers were kicked and thrown down. A *Vadde Vuppura* woman was reportedly raped to death by a number of soldiers.<sup>51</sup> Military vans, 120 sepoy, machine guns and some European soldiers and a good many reserve policemen were drafted into the town.<sup>52</sup> The ryots of the area were apprised clearly by Konda Venkatappayya, President of the Andhra Provincial Congress Committee, of the length to which they would have to stand the Government's threatened measures: it would attach and bring to immediate sale their properties and award them to members of the depressed classes and ex-soldiers. They were also apprised of the worst consequences that might follow, with the possibility of their becoming "the very helots which the Panchamas are now". But the ryots were firm. They were confident that the Panchamas would not betray them. The Panchamas of this area had always co-operated with the caste Hindus. Only the Christians among them were not amenable to nationalistic ideas. The ryots had the least hesitation to run the risk, determined as they were to allow themselves to be completely effaced, if that would lead to a speedier attainment of *Swaraj*.

That Venkatapayya had full confidence in the people of Guntur district was evident from the following statement: "Generally speaking, the deltaic taluks seem to fall behind, probably because of their closer contact with those who have imbibed western ideas of living. But we have the best example from Chirala and Perala which have made a stand so wonderful and so exemplary that they have led the country as it were, to the sacrifice that it is now prepared to make. Repalle, though situated in the deltaic area, has progressed a great deal and will stand the struggle. If people in these areas make a determined stand till at least 10 February when the second instalment of *kist* falls due—which there is no reason to doubt—the Movement would spread to other *taluks* also where the people would likewise be kindled with the same spirit and prove equally firm in their attitude".<sup>53</sup>

Though the ryots were ready for the campaign, the decision as to whether there was to be a suspension or complete non-payment of taxes rested entirely with the Working Committee of the Andhra Provincial Congress Committee. The ryots were even told that, if for any reason the Committee gave the mandate that taxes should be paid, they should not be disappointed but be prepared to lay down their *kists* to the Government. When the Committee met, some expressed doubts as to the advisability of launching the No-



Tax campaign in that part of the country before Mahatma Gandhi did so at Bardoli.<sup>54</sup> But local opinion was strong on this; there would be no retracing their steps as that would cause serious damage to the ardour of the non-co-operators. In the meantime Gandhiji had made it known that he would not stand in the way of the Andhras' proceeding with the programme of No-Tax Campaign even before 31 January 1922, provided they fulfilled the tests laid down and proved capable of endless suffering without retaliation. This message was actually contained in his article for *Young India* of 26 January 1922 which was published in advance by the *Bombay Chronicle*. Gandhiji concluded the article thus: "I have nothing to say but to pronounce 'God bless the brave Andhras'".<sup>55</sup>

The Working Committee of the APCC meeting on 25 and 26 January 1922 decided to limit the area where the "No-tax campaign" was to be carried and to appoint a Committee to investigate and report whether conditions conducive to launching such a campaign prevailed in that area. The question of the final refusal of taxes would be resolved in accordance with the opinion of that Committee.<sup>56</sup>

While the meeting was going on in front of the Desabhakta's house, arrests were made of men advocating non-payment of *kist*. During the trial of the popular Congress worker Tanuku Kovvali Gopal Rao, who was sentenced to one year rigorous imprisonment, the Tahsildar—witness for prosecution—deposed that nine villages suspended payment due to his preaching. The young accused neither defended himself nor made a statement but handed over an inspiring message to the people left behind, emphasising that the responsibility thereafter fell on them to continue the propaganda. The public, except a few, were refused admission to the Court hall. But the same evening a public meeting was held opposite the court when all the speakers including a lady—Subbamma Garu—dwelt on the same topic which was held objectionable in Gopal Rao's case and challenged the authorities to arrest them.<sup>57</sup>

The Madras Government reported that the civil disobedience in Guntur was engineered by the local committee disregarding the advice of Gandhiji and the doubts entertained by other organisations as to the capacity of the satyagrahis to carry on a No-Tax campaign. The report added that ultimately Gandhiji "bowed to the superior knowledge of conditions possessed by the leaders on the spot".<sup>58</sup> The Madras Government admitted that the Movement was most advanced in this area of Peddanandipadu, neces-

sitating the imposition of punitive police action.

The boldness of the Andhra Nationalists reached its climax when the Andhra Provincial Conference passed a resolution in 1922 promising support to the Turks in the event of a war with England. This open threat of co-operation with Britain's possible enemies frightened the Secretary of State so much that he wanted legislation against such a move.<sup>59</sup> The Government of India felt that the Secretary of State was unduly apprehensive although they did not rule out that the Turks at Laussane might derive some moral support from the Andhra Congress. William Vincent who was then in England told the Secretary of State that the resolution was "so much hot air". It was even dismissed in some circles as the verbal gesture by some very "unmartial sections of the community".<sup>60</sup> In his reply to the Secretary of State, the Viceroy said that Andhra being a Hindu province, the resolution had no serious significance; that it was merely a gesture of pretended sympathy, intended to help the Hindu-Muslim *entente* which was fostered by "Hindu politicians for their own reasons . . ."; and that in case of any real danger, the existing provisions of the IPC Section 124-A would suffice.<sup>61</sup>

The episodes in the Andhra districts highlighted in the foregoing pages should not lead one to conclude that the other districts of the Presidency were remaining idle, contributing precious little to the widespread campaign of non-co-operation. At a mass meeting held at the Vellore Fort maidan Rajaji, E. V. Ramaswami Naicker and Subrahmania Sastri, President of the Provincial Congress Committee who presided over the meeting, were arrested on 14 December 1921 under section 188 of the IPC on a charge of disobeying the order prohibiting them from addressing public meetings. E. V. Ramaswami Naicker was also charged with abetting temperance pickets at Erode. Addressing a meeting of 5000, Rajaji said that the National Flag hoisted in the maidan for the meeting held in defiance of the Magistrate's order, bore on it the symbol of non-violence—the spinning wheel. He said the Government's repression had hastened the pace of *Swaraj* in an unexpected but welcome manner. He elaborated on *Swadeshi* and the drink evil and appealed to the Hindus and Muslims to unite and protect all other classes, especially Christians and Panchamas whose trust and goodwill were necessary for *Swaraj*. He urged the people to keep to the path of non-violence under all provocation. Order and silence prevailed throughout the meeting. There was not even clapping of



hands till the meeting dispersed at 7.30 in the evening. Another notable feature was the donning of *Khadar* by a majority in the gathering. During the week *Khadar* worth Rs. 3000 was sold in Vellore town alone.<sup>62</sup>

When Rajaji was arrested and brought to trial before the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Vellore, he admitted that he disobeyed Order under Section 144 and invited the maximum sentence prescribed. He was sentenced to three months' Simple Imprisonment.<sup>63</sup>

At Panamarattuppatti, a village 7 miles from Salem, advocates were gagged by the Government. T.S. Tiruvenkatachari, First Grade Pleader, S.V. Subrahmania Iyer, High Court Vakil, T.S. Muthukrishna Iyer, Second Grade Pleader and N. Rama Rao who had suspended practice were arrested on 23 January 1922 for picketing toddy shops and delivering public lectures and speeches inciting the people to resist the lawful authority of the Government. An "ex-parte" order was passed by the Sub-Divisional First Class Magistrate preventing them from delivering any speech or lecture on any political subject or on any matter connected with the picketing of toddy or arrack shops within the limits of Salem and Attur taluks.<sup>64</sup>

Erode did very bravely in the matter of temperance. E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker\* was sentenced to one month's simple imprisonment in December 1921. During the preceding fortnight, thirty-seven convictions had taken place in this small town of Erode. Undaunted by the arrest of Ramaswami Naicker, his wife and sister took up picketing. The Criminal Law Amendment Act was put into force there. Doings in the Presidency impelled Gandhiji to say: "Madras and Andhra are slowly but surely creeping up and I should not be surprised if the Dravidians came up to the level of Bengal which has now 1,500 imprisonments to its credit".<sup>65</sup>

### *The Government's Response: Repression and Coercion:*

The Madras Provincial Congress had a moderate success in inducing title holders to relinquish their titles. A majority of those in Government service could not make such a sacrifice for obvious reasons. The Reports of the Madras Government themselves vouch for the renunciation of their titles and honorary appointments by a number of Muslims. The boycott of colleges by Muslim students

\* Congressman; "Vaikom hero"; later left the Congress to start the Self-Respect Movement and to found the *Dravida Kazhagam*.

in pursuance of the policy of non-co-operation is also on record.<sup>66</sup> Quite a few patriotic-minded vakils suspended their practice in order to dedicate themselves to the Movement.\* Merchants were persuaded not to deal in foreign goods. The Movement was also directed against the consumption of alcohol. Temperance was therefore advocated ceaselessly through the press and the public platforms. The non-co-operators also picketed toddy shops and taverns. The services of village *samajams* or *samooahams* and religious *melas* were enlisted in carrying the programme into rural areas. Since the Government lost an enormous amount of excise revenue on account of the temperance movements of the non-co-operators, it accused the latter of aiming at the destruction of Government revenue rather than the promotion of true temperance.

Violence might have erupted on certain occasions when anti-social elements came into play. In general, the Movement was peaceful in the Presidency, the leaders laying especial emphasis on non-violence. The tendency, however, of Willingdon's Government was to blame the non-co-operators for any violence anywhere in the Presidency. He ascribed any deficit in finance to the Non-co-operation Movement and often regretted that his Government could not carry out the full programme of legislation he outlined because of the disturbing influence of non-co-operation.<sup>67</sup> The Justice Ministry too, which worked hand in glove with the Government blamed the non-co-operators for all their failures. Speaking on the deplorable state of the Presidency's finance, Ramarayaningar\*\* once said that the reason for it could not be traced to any want of care on the part of either the Finance Member or the Provincial Government but to the activities of the non-co-operators to a large extent. Asserting that the latter had cost the provincial exchequer nearly a crore of rupees he said that, but for the activities of the "extremist politicians, there would have been no loss of excise revenue, no extra expenditure for the increase of the police force. In fact there would have been no occasion for introducing taxation bills into this Council. But for their activities, the people of this Presidency would not have been driven to the necessity of being asked to pay increased stamps or enhanced court fees. . . ."<sup>68</sup> According to P.T. Chetty the non-co-operators worked out only one item successfully and that was the use of *Swadeshi* goods. While the ministers in the other Provinces were appreciative of the *charka*

\* Rajaji was one among them. He also stopped his children from going to schools.

\*\* Raja of Panagal.



and the need to bring it into use all over the country, the Justice ministers in Madras made fun of it.

As for the Governor, he had all along been declaring the Movement a revolutionary one which had to be stopped. He complained that "Gandhi's emissaries" in the Presidency were spreading feelings of hatred of the British and that a spirit of indiscipline among the masses was making Government's efforts to carry on administration extremely difficult. When the visit to Madras of Kitchlew and Shaukat Ali in August 1920 became known, he wired to the Viceroy to allow him to exclude them from the Presidency on the plea that they would produce chaos in the Presidency leading to paralysis of administration.<sup>69</sup>

Willingdon was unhappy that the unsavoury rumours carried by the non-co-operators to the masses about his Government had not been effectively countered by Government officials. While addressing the Indian Officers' Association he once bluntly said that the officers were not availing themselves of all the opportunities possible for refuting misstatements about the Government. He wanted them to carry more of propaganda work at their respective stations and to impress on the masses that his Government did everything only for their good.<sup>70</sup> In April 1921, his Government issued an order revising the Government Servants Conduct Rules pointing out that it was the duty of all Government officials to oppose non-co-operation and to co-operate with non-officials in combating the Movement. The Government Reports gave the widest publicity to the "Reforms" Conference at Calicut which was presided over by Besant, and to the anti-non-co-operation meetings held by a Justice Minister in the North Arcot and Coimbatore districts.<sup>71</sup>

Willingdon launched a policy of repression so as to clap into jail as many non-co-operators as possible. The Marjoribanks\* circular which sought to "manufacture loyalty to order", called upon Government officials to conduct anti-nationalist propaganda and aid loyalists. The Madras Government made use of the simple preventive provisions in Chapters VIII to XII of the Criminal Procedure Code rendering them "as effective a repressive weapon as may be desired by the most O' Dwyerism of British bureaucrats".<sup>72</sup> The Police Act and the Sedition Sections of the Penal Code were used merely to supplement these provisions. The

\* First Member of the Governor's Executive Council.

Government of Madras launched frontal attacks as well as flank and rear operations. An orgy of prosecutions for sedition characterised the period from 1920–22. There were direct and indirect attacks on citizens embracing every field of their rights. The students too were not spared. The Education department of the Government of India wanted all local Governments and administrations (Bombay excepted) to report the number of students on rolls in schools and colleges and the number of absentees involved in the Non-co-operation Movement.<sup>73</sup>

There were incidents of racial discrimination, arrogance and insolence in which many popular Congressmen were victimised. Willingdon's order to Government servants requiring them to sever social relations with their non-co-operator relatives and friends, led some popular officers to relinquish their posts.<sup>74</sup> To cite an instance, V. V. Jogiah Pantulu resigned his posts of Government Pleader and Public Prosecutor for his "son's sins" in 1922. In his letter of resignation to the Chief Secretary, he wrote that though he differed from his son V. V. Giri\* in regard to the Non-co-operation Movement it was very unreasonable, unnatural and against the long cherished Indian sentiment to ask an honest, loyal and law-abiding public servant to send out of his house his own son simply because the latter differed in his political views with the father. "I do not at all think that such social relations with non-co-operators or the wearing of homespun cloth, that is, *khadar*, will interfere in anyway with the due and faithful discharge of one's responsibilities to the State". Freedom of speech, of association and of other fundamental rights were under suspension where the non-co-operator was concerned. His movements were so restricted as to practically extern or even intern him. Processions were tabooed and meetings were prohibited. Peaceful attempts at persuading people to abstain from drinks and foreign cloth were penalised. The right to association was threatened expressly by the Criminal Law Amendment Act and insidiously by recourse to preventive sections.<sup>75</sup>

Such distinguished Nationalists as V.V.S. Iyer, Yakub Hasan, Subrahmanya Siva, Varadarajulu Naidu and N.S. Ramaswamy Iyengar were among those victimised under 124-A of the Penal Code. This "Prince of Sections" was so elastic and so comprehensive that no one prosecuted thereunder could ever hope to get out of its clutches. The Government was unable to suffer the in-

\* President of India (1969–'74).



creasing popularity and success of the Non-co-operation Movement. The *khadar* promotion programme, temperance work and picketing of foreign cloth shops organised peacefully by the nationalists drove the Madras Government to order a campaign against the donning of *khadar*, especially against what was popularly known as the “Gandhi Cap”! Three patriots of the Godavari district—Malpuri Narasimhan, Gollapudi Srirama Sastri and Prayoga Viswanathan were all sentenced to 10 days’ Simple Imprisonment each under Section 228 of the Indian Penal Code for no other crime than wearing the Gandhi Cap while appearing before the District Magistrate. According to the latter they put on their head-dresses deliberately to insult his court! When this matter was discussed at the Madras Legislature one member demanded that the Madras Government should censure the District Magistrate. He said in Bombay and northern India pupils and scholars were wearing Gandhi Cap and Gandhi Coat of which nobody took notice.<sup>76</sup> Some students of the Medical College at Vizagapatam were dismissed, ostensibly for indiscipline but really for daring to don *khadar*<sup>77</sup>. The pure white cloth and cap, the symbol of *Swadeshi*, proved a veritable red-rag to some of the police and military underdogs. The Mappilla police earned an unenviable notoriety for their intensive campaign against *khadar*<sup>78</sup>. Under Section 3 (6) of the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876, the staging of even innocuous plays like *Swarajya Soppanam* was prohibited as seditious and calculated to create disaffection and unrest<sup>79</sup>. The worst part of the repression was forbidding Congress volunteers from rendering succour to the victims of the Mappilla rebellion in Malabar.<sup>80</sup>

Non-co-operators who were arrested under shadowy pretexts were convicted and imprisoned after a mock trial. And treatment to political prisoners in jail was execrable. One of the most serious blots of Willingdon’s administration was the refusal to accord a tolerable treatment to political prisoners in jails. Felons and political offenders were treated alike. The non-co-operators were huddled among a pack of criminals, dacoits and murderers, and were treated in the same manner as any other criminal. Whenever the matter was raised in the Council in the form of resolutions aiming at alleviating their plight, “outrageously heartless” people like P.T. Chetty did their best to torpedo them. Commenting on P.T. Chetty’s behaviour in the house when the arrest of Yakub Hasan was debated, V. Chakkari Chetty stated that one could never believe that an old gentleman like him could have lost his

sense of proportion and decency. "Not even the worst Anglo-Indian bureaucrat could have spoken as he did; and we who are out to destroy the Anglo-Indian bureaucracy are not going to allow these pinchbeck bureaucrats of the brown and black variety".<sup>81</sup>

Members of the House often pleaded for the political prisoners. They endeavoured in vain to drive home the truth that they were not arguing the cause of stone throwers and assaulters, but of those who, in conformity with their political ideas, refused to plead for themselves and who, in consequence, suffered the extreme penalties meted out to them. Political prisoners were those who being convinced that Government was not discharging its duties properly, violated some laws in order to bring about a change in the Government. In the case of the non-co-operators, their disobedience to certain laws of the Government hardly involved any violence to the society. The Government was therefore least justified in classifying them under the category of criminals and meting out to them inhuman treatment. It presented a marked contrast to the facilities extended to common European criminals in these very jails. A European bandit or murderer would get meat and milk in jail whereas an Indian political prisoner would be shut up in the same cell with an ordinary Indian criminal facing the gallows.<sup>82</sup>

On 20 January 1922, C. V. Venkataramana Iyer moved a resolution in the Council seeking necessary changes in the jail rules so that political offenders might be "treated as first class misdemeanants are treated in England".<sup>83</sup> Such men of the Justice Party as B. Muniswamy Naidu and R.K. Shanmukham Chetty supported the motion, taking a wider view of the whole question. In the words of R.K. Shanmukham Chetty "... in our bitter antagonism to the sort of political propaganda in this country we are completely blinding ourselves to the elementary principles of constitutional practice and legal procedure prevailing in any civilised country".<sup>84</sup>

A.T. Palmer opposed the motion on the baseless plea that the nature of punishment meted out to the political prisoners ought to be left entirely to the discretion of the Magistrates. He did so despite his knowledge of the unjust treatment accorded to political offenders by the Magistrates. P.T. Chetty was particularly nasty in his remarks about the non-co-operators in prison. This should be attributed to the humiliation he suffered during the visit of the Prince of Wales. When the mover of the motion referred to a speech made by Chetty, the latter interrupted him unceremoniously and made this most unsavoury remark: "... I did not say that there



should be a different treatment (for political prisoners) but I said that there should be a severer treatment".<sup>85</sup> On another occasion, when Satyamurti referred to the unabashed justification by Chetty on the floor of the house that "political prisoners should be treated worse than dacoits or robbers", Chetty muttered an indistinct remark sitting in his seat. But the Chair ignored it ordering "Mr. Satyamurti will proceed". Disregarding the ruling of the Chair, he interrupted Satyamurti a second time declaring aloud that not only had he made a certain observation but would continue to do so. A pandemonium followed in the House and tremendous cries of "shame, shame" greeted him from every direction. That was one of the very few occasions when the President called the police to clear the visitors' galleries.<sup>86</sup> It is astonishing that there should have been such an array of opposition to such a question of considerable importance. The Law Member, K. Srinivasa Iyengar, refused to accept the resolution as the local Government could not do what the mover wanted "unless there is a change in the legislation, unless the Act is amended and unless the Indian Penal Code also is amended".<sup>87</sup>

#### *The Protests against Repression:*

There was widespread protest against the intolerable and oppressive policy of the government against the non-co-operators. As noted earlier, when the village munsifs resigned wholesale on the issue of non-payment of taxes, the embarrassed Madras Government refused to accept their resignations and coerced them into performing their duties. A public meeting of the citizens of Madras who were not non-co-operators, held in November 1921, condemned the official campaign outright. The meeting passed a resolution congratulating heartily the victims of the Government's repressive policy on having borne their suffering courageously and cheerfully for the cause of *Swaraj*.

The lawyers of the Madras city whose conscience was outraged by the prosecutions and arrests indulged in by the Government, registered an emphatic protest against the policy early in December 1921. Expressing their indignation at the campaign of repression pursued by the Government, lawyers of the stature of S. Srinivasa Iyengar and T.R. Ramachandra Iyer recorded their deep resentment at the "abuse of the ordinary provisions of law for political purposes". Their protest Manifesto said: "We are emphatically of the opinion that this policy of repression involves unwarranted and

unconstitutional interference with the liberties of the citizens. We consider that the wholesale and unjustifiable arrests and imprisonments of public spirited citizens for political activities constitute a grave menace to public safety and express our firm conviction that such measures inaugurated in the name of law and order are really subversive of law and order".<sup>88</sup> The Madras Vakils' Association put up a spirited protest against the lawless acts of the magistrates. Its memorial to Government in April 1922 observed: "The general feeling among the profession is that the recent orders passed by the magistracy under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, preventing non-co-operators and all and sundry from making speeches or holding meetings and orders under sections 107 and 108, directing persons to give security are a fraud upon the law. The Government in initiating proceedings and enabling magistrates to pass such orders are bringing the administration of justice to contempt, and in this way the action of the Government and of the magistracy is calculated to make people show no respect for law and order".<sup>89</sup>

Even the Moderates were not unaware of the dangers of the indiscriminate attacks on the liberty of the subject. The extension of Part II of Criminal Law Amendment Act by the Government of India was vehemently opposed by P. S. Sivaswamy Iyer as uncalled for in several places in the Presidency.<sup>90</sup> Willingdon himself had admitted that outside the Martial Law area in Malabar there was no proof of any mischievous activity to warrant its extension. But acting merely on the initiative of the Government of India, the Madras Government proceeded against associations and individuals in sympathy with the National Movement. In doing so, it did not even satisfy itself as to the illegality of their objects and activities. The associations formed to picket shops selling liquor or foreign cloth should not have been proceeded against as the picketeers did not employ "criminal intimidation". Liquor was the cause not only of poverty but of moral degradation and it was to bring home these lessons to the masses that intensive picketing of liquor shops was undertaken. The Government thus provoked the people by the premature extension of an act in the absence of a felt necessity, merely as a precautionary measure.<sup>91</sup>

Some moderate leaders of Madras were really so concerned about the repression that they were anxious to pass a resolution condemning it. But they were silenced by their counterparts in the other provinces of India, chiefly Bombay. Moving such resolution



was deemed to be a "fatal mistake, shattering the whole liberal party". They even refused to call it a policy of repression as it only aimed at suppressing lawlessness and hooliganism with all their attendant evils. Wacha's words addressed to P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer are a standing testimony to the Moderates' supreme trust in the policy then pursued by the British, and their corresponding distrust of the non-co-operators. "Our Liberals seem helpless and fail to recognise the policy the Government are pursuing. I wish you and other level-headed and level-balanced (Liberals) will attend the conference (at Allahabad) and prevent any imprudent and short-sighted resolution (from being) passed. . . . The Government will have lost all confidence in them. . . . The non-co-operators will then have the entire field to themselves and will do their very best to further embarrass Government so far as to force a resolution. . . . Do these short-sighted Liberals of Bengal, Madras, U.P., and other places recognise the disastrous consequences of the resolution they might light-heartedly pass? . . . The whole party will be lost for ever never to rise again".<sup>92</sup>

Wacha's letter had the desired effect. P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer took a totally different stand during the debate on the policy of repression in the Legislative Assembly in January 1922. His inconsistency caused not a little pain to many. The voting list laid bare the truth that a wide gulf separated public opinion and the legislative influence in the country under the new Act. No doubt men like T. Rangachari and T. V. Seshagiri Iyer put up a brave fight against the repressive policy of the local Government. But P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer who, as President of the Madras Liberal League, had hardly a month earlier condemned the repressive policy of the Government of Madras, now acted differently betraying "the interest of the country as well as himself by acting as a notorious champion of the local Governments".<sup>93</sup> Far from defending the liberty of the subject he spoke at length on the side-issue of the effect of non-co-operation. He was supported by Sapru who claimed to be a "non-believer in Gandhi and Gandhism" and who was unhappy over the incalculable harm non-co-operation had done to the Country.<sup>94</sup> It is hard to believe that these Liberals who were robust Congressites till the split occurred in 1918, could say that the Non-co-operation Movement would have fizzled out but for the wholesale repression resorted to by the Government. They averred that by jailing a large number of people the Government gave the Movement an exaggerated importance and a fresh lease of life.<sup>95</sup>

C. Ramalinga Reddy, who was then a member of the Justice Party, sternly condemned the use of repression to check the political discontent. While delivering the Presidential address at the non-Brahman conference at Trichinopoly in September 1921, he said: "Wholesale arrests, deportations and similar acts, however legal, will, human nature being what it is, create a new situation far worse than the existing one. . . . It is by associating people more largely in the Government of the country and giving them more responsibility that the Movement could be checked and overcome".

As for the Governor's attitude it is true that Willingdon had no racial prejudice. On the contrary he was second to none in deploring racial insolence whenever he had an occasion to do so. He even said that the "real bedrock cause" of most of their (British) troubles in India was born out of the "arrogant superiority" which they asserted over the citizens of India.<sup>96</sup> The British soldiers looked upon the Indian as a black man who needed to be treated as such. The British businessmen would not let even the most distinguished of Indians enter the portals of their club. The Englishman's one and only concern was to make as much money as possible and as quickly as possible in India and then get away to spend it at home. Unless this situation was altered, "I gravely fear we shall lose this country as part of the British Empire. . . . Unless every Englishman who comes out here will realise that the Indian is a fellow citizen of the Empire and must be treated as such and *Not* as an inferior being, I tremble for the future".<sup>97</sup>

But the very same Willingdon was intolerant, autocratic and capricious towards the non-co-operators who were treated as "niggers". To quote an instance or two: *The Hindu* became an object of scorn because it was a non-co-operating paper. No doubt as early as 16 November 1920 the Government of India conveyed its decision to all local Governments that newspapers and publications which definitely advocated non-co-operation should be deprived of the privilege of inserting Government advertisements in their columns. But it left the matter to the discretion of the local Governments who, being well acquainted with the tone of the local press, could best appreciate the probable effect of the action contemplated. *The Hindu* and the *Swadesamitran* were among the 26 newspapers listed by the Government of India as definitely advocating non-co-operation.<sup>98</sup> Government advertisements, however, continued to appear in *The Hindu*. Questions were raised



by some sections of the public whether the adoption of the Nagpur Congress resolution on boycott of foreign goods, did not prohibit the insertion of advertisements relating to foreign goods either by foreign or Indian merchants in a Nationalist organ like *The Hindu*. Such a criticism was sedulously fostered by some anti-Congressites who were jealous of the paper's brilliant performance. While addressing a Non-Brahman Conference at Kanchipuram, P.T. Chetty accused *The Hindu* of want of sincerity in publishing advertisements of Government and of European firms. *The Hindu* replied with a view to dispelling such a misconception that it did not have to abstain from inserting such advertisements for two reasons. In the first place, no scheme of economic boycott had as yet been planned and formulated. Secondly, while formulating any such scheme, the conditions under which the newspaper enterprise was conducted would never be lost sight of: for, no paper of high standing and wide circulation could exist even for a day if it "eschewed altogether foreign articles and foreign and governmental agencies". The nationalist organ then challenged such men who indulged in indiscriminate criticism, to face the contingency of not having such a paper at all if their wish was implemented.<sup>99</sup>

Displeased with *The Hindu* for a variety of reasons, Willingdon suddenly withheld Government House news and circulars from it. It was not merely the service rendered by the paper to the nationalistic and popular cause that irked him. Its strong support of the Gandhian way and constant attacks on the administration of the Presidency for its repressive measures filled him with fury. *The Hindu* often painted the Willingdon regime in sombre colour pointing that on the administrative and political side there was "little to praise and much to blame for". But it had struck terror among the bureaucracy on earlier occasions too. By its reviews on the administrations of Arthur Lawley and Pentland, *The Hindu* mercilessly exposed the drawbacks of those two Governors. But none of them took the drastic step of Willingdon. The motive behind the act of the Madras Government was more personal. When the proposal to erect statues for the Willingdons was mooted by the Governor's admirers, *The Hindu* criticised it. Willingdon who abhorred criticism was all the more enraged when it emanated from an English daily which had the largest circulation. This personal animosity had a curious sequel. The Governor's Private Secretary refused to allow the representative of the paper any facilities. The

excerpts from the representative's report of the conversation between him and the Private Secretary to the Governor given below would certainly be of interest.<sup>100</sup>

*Representative:* I have been asked by the Editor of *The Hindu*. . . . Why we have not been receiving Government House news for the last few days and why we did not receive a copy of the Viceroy's tour programme when a copy was sent to other papers like the *Madras Mail*, the *Daily Express*, the *New India* and the *Justice*?

*Private Secretary:* You are a non-co-operating paper. When you do not co-operate with the Government, why should the Government co-operate with you?

*Representative:* Knowing that our paper is a non-co-operating paper, why have you been sending all kinds of news to *The Hindu* all these years and why do you suddenly stop the news just now?

*Private Secretary:* We ought to have stopped such news to *The Hindu* long ago. That we gave you news in the past is no reason why we should continue to do so in the future.

*Representative:* It seems you told our representative the other day that *The Hindu* was making personal attacks upon His Excellency, that it was a non-co-operating paper, and that therefore you would not give him a list of nominated Members to the Council\*. Can you show a single instance where *The Hindu* has made a personal attack against His Excellency?

Replying that there were a number of such instances, the Private Secretary referred to the criticism levelled by *The Hindu* against the proposed memorial for the Willingdons which was an "insult offered to His Excellency".

*Representative:* We do say that His Excellency has not done so much valuable public work to the community to deserve a statue. How can it be considered an attack on His Excellency? We simply expressed the popular views. Any other instance, Sir?

*Private Secretary:* *The Hindu* wrote a leaderette in connection with my refusal to give the nomination list. It is simply insulting me.

*Representative:* You consider the article insulting. There are others, very many, who have expressed their high appreciation of it. Very good. You are at perfect liberty to stop the news. But may I understand that His Excellency's Private Secretary has the authority and sanction of His Excellency in what he says and does?

*Private Secretary:* I have just spoken to His Excellency the Governor on

\* Second House under the Reformed Council.



this matter. He tells me: "I don't mind *The Hindu's* personal attack on me. . . . You have been personally attacked. I give you liberty in the matter of furnishing news".

Mention may be made of certain other organs of the Non-co-operation Movement in the Presidency such as the *Muhammadan* (English) which advocated the adoption of non-co-operation by Muslims; the prominent Urdu paper *Quami Report*; Tamil papers like the *Desabhaktan*, the *Tamil Nadu*, the *Swadesamitran* and the *Vaisyamitran*; Telugu newspapers like the *Andhra Patrika*, the *Krishna Patrika* and the *Hitakarini*; and Kannada journals like the *Swadesabhimani* and *Kanthirava*. The articles these papers carried were pronounced to be inflammatory by the Government of Madras which dubbed some of them "rabid organs", adopting an extremist attitude, and engendering the spirit of opposition to authority. As for the quality of non-co-operation propaganda in the Press, the Government said that it "ranged from the polished journalism of *The Hindu* to the crude and sometimes lewd abuse of Government and the British which distinguished the smaller journals".<sup>101</sup> The Telugu papers which were their main target of attack were charged with dishing up to their readers "the most unwholesome food picked up from the rabid anti-British press of North India and Irish-America. Mudslinging at Government officials helped to keep up the circulation of the minor papers".<sup>102</sup>

There were other occasions when Willingdon showed a marked antipathy towards the non-co-operators. His action as Grand Master in insisting on the exclusion of Rajaji from his Lodge simply because he was a non-co-operator, was unbecoming of his position as the constitutional head of a large Presidency. His officious warning to the YMCA against the interference of its officials in political affairs deserves special mention here. The Rev. Mr. Poplay wrote a letter to *The Hindu*—purely in his personal capacity—condemning the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi in connection with the Non-co-operation Movement. Willingdon strongly deprecated this letter publicly while delivering a speech on 2 April 1922 on the occasion of the foundation laying ceremony of a new YMCA building at Octacamund. Surprisingly it did not occur to Willingdon that the Non-co-operation Movement was a direct fruit of the Britishers' colour pride which he had himself discommended. The *Indian Messenger* uttered a friendly word of warning that unless the Englishman mended his ways completely, non-co-

operation would doubtless bring about the "Nemesis it had started under the force of the inexorable law of *karma*".<sup>103</sup>

*The Bombay Meet: Search for consensus:*

In 1921, the Non-co-operation Movement was at its zenith. Some leaders were anxious to bring about a meeting between the Government and the political parties, particularly the non-co-operators. In July 1921, Saiyed Raza Ali proposed a resolution to this effect in the Council of State. Therein he recommended the convening at an early date of an informal Conference to be attended by the Members of the Government of India and the representatives of all schools of political thought including leaders of the Non-co-operation Movement. The conference was to discuss all political questions freely.<sup>104</sup> But at the Legislative Assembly, Faiyaz Khan moved a resolution recommending that no such informal Conference should be convened. William Vincent supported the second resolution on the ground that the two major political problems had already been thrashed out. He argued that the Punjab question, decided partly by the Government of India and partly by His Majesty's Government, had been fully debated in the Legislative Assembly and that the general feeling was that it should be dropped. As for *Khilafat*, he stated that the Government of India had done everything possible to secure lenient terms and hence no useful purpose would be served by a conference. As for the question of immediate *Swaraj*, he added the Government of India had settled it, and so they were not justified in reopening it. Above all, Vincent was strongly opposed to any parleying with the non-co-operators who were being prosecuted for spreading sedition and violence. He was certain that the non-co-operators themselves would not care to attend such a conference.<sup>105</sup> But the matter did not stop there.

Between September and December 1921, T. Rangachari and some other members brought in a number of resolutions in the Assembly. They recommended the election by both Houses of 12 Members (8 from the Legislative Assembly and 4 from the Council of State) to meet at a Round Table Conference. It was to be attended by the representatives of the Government and selected leaders from the Congress and the All India Muslim League. The conference would chalk out a *modus vivendi* for bringing about harmony and co-operation in the land. The Council of State also recommended similar measures.<sup>106</sup> About the same time, i.e., in December 1921,



a deputation headed by Malaviya and Besant had an interview with Viceroy Reading who readily conceded to them that the Government of India could not go to the full length in the case of the Punjab. He said: "I am perfectly aware of the desire on the part of many that more should be done. When recommendations have been very forcibly presented to me, I have not accepted them, because I have thought that I could not conscientiously give effect to them". Regarding *Khilafat*, he told the deputation frankly that the strongest representation to His Majesty's Government at home had been made by him as well as by Chelmsford.<sup>107</sup> The Viceroy's statements "What is the fault alleged against the Government of India in this respect? Where do we fail?" proved his Government's inability to make any positive gesture towards the Nationalists in view of the unhelpful attitude of the Home Government over the two issues.<sup>108</sup>

The Viceroy also stood for a policy of non-intervention with the Non-co-operation Movement. Such a policy was publicly set forth by Chelmsford in his speech to the Imperial Legislative Council in September 1920 and, a couple of months later, it was officially promulgated in a Government resolution. But the other members of the Viceroy's Council, worried as they were about the potential effects of the campaign on the labour element in metropolitan towns, were against it. They wanted a radical change in the policy. Even Willingdon's Government which was confident that the Congress would eventually resile from such a "chimerical scheme" as non-co-operation, was overanxious to take fierce repressive action against the non-co-operators. Willingdon condemned the Movement as a negative one and emphatically declared that the remedy to check the political discontent lay in repression and not in the redressal of grievances or reforms.<sup>109</sup>

Viceroy Reading, however, expressed his anxiety to the Malaviya deputation about the grave effects that any "affront" to the Prince of Wales might have on the public and parliament of the United Kingdom. He insisted on the discontinuance of the "unlawful activities of the non-co-operation party" as a pre-condition to any discussion for a conference. This Viceregal utterance pained Gandhiji so much that he called it his "mischievous misinterpretation of the attitude of the Congress and the *Khilafat* organisation in connection with the visit of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales".<sup>110</sup>

The Malaviya deputation did bring about a change in the

Viceroy's attitude though it lasted for too short a duration. The Viceroy did take up Malaviya's proposal to call a Round Table Conference with Gandhiji and the Moderates, in a desperate effort to contain the situation arising out of non-co-operation. It looked as if the Viceroy was determined to convert the atmosphere of antagonism into one of co-operation and harmony. On 18 December, the Viceroy received messages indicating that Gandhiji was ready to attend such a Round Table Conference and that preparations were ahead for a moderate delegation to confer with the Viceroy on 21 December at Calcutta to settle the details. But the Governors of very few provinces assented to the proposal. Willingdon, the Viceroy's bosom companion, telegraphed plainly his opposition to Reading's policy.<sup>111</sup> Even the Viceroy's Cabinet was against it. Its members were afraid that any compromise with the non-co-operating Congress would strengthen these Nationalists and correspondingly weaken the Government's hold on the Moderates. Impressed by the Nationalists' triumph against the British Government, the Moderates might return to the Congress fold and strengthen its demand for *Swaraj*. The Viceroy had to reckon with this opposition to the proposal for a Round Table Conference. Finally he rejected T. Rangachari's resolution for a Round Table Conference in an Order of the Executive Council.

Subsequently, on 28 December 1921, the thirty sixth session of the Congress meeting at Ahmedabad rejected by an overwhelming majority Malaviya's proposition urging the Congress to declare its desire for a Round Table Conference on reasonable terms. Gandhiji said that it would be inconsistent with the dignity of the Congress to pass a resolution about the conference when there was nothing in the Viceregal pronouncement to show that the Congress was called upon to make any response.<sup>112</sup> However when the invitation was extended to Gandhiji to attend the All Parties' Conference at Bombay, he expressed his readiness to do so mainly because he hoped to persuade his moderate friends to see eye to eye with the Congress on the issue of a Round Table Conference.<sup>113</sup>

#### *The Chairman's volte face:*

Unfortunately, a very annoying situation developed at this Bombay conference held on 14 January 1922. C. Sankaran Nair, who was the President of this Conference, resigned his office in the middle of the Conference refusing to lead the deliberations. This conference was intended to bring about an understanding between



the Congress and the Government. Gandhiji was not a delegate but he was included in the 20 member committee appointed by the Conference to draft proposals for a compromise. The Committee prepared the draft resolution which did not contain any clause about the release of the Ali brothers and other political prisoners. But during his address, Gandhiji listed his minimum demands as release of the *Khilafat* and political prisoners; guarantee of non-interference with non-co-operation activities; and the discussion at the proposed Round Table Conference of a scheme of Dominion Status for India. He also made it known that he would not suspend preparations for the civil disobedience while talks were on for a settlement. Sankaran Nair, who disagreed with these “unflinchable demands” of Gandhiji, walked out of the Conference in a huff, refusing to participate further in the proceedings. He alleged that Gandhiji had humiliated the Government even before the opening of the Round Table Conference by putting forth “impossible conditions”.<sup>114</sup>

It was as a member of the Indian Nationalist party that Sankaran Nair was called upon to participate in the proceedings of the Conference. Nair's views about Gandhiji and his movement being more bitter and intense than the most violent opinions entertained by the “British bureaucracy and the hostile press”, he ought to have gracefully declined the offer to chair the conference. Having accepted the offer it was unpardonable on his part to indulge in a tirade against the Nationalists whose cause he was expected to champion. He thus arrogated to himself the functions of the Government which was the other party to the conference.

After Nair's departure, M. Visveswarayya was appointed President of the Conference. It passed a resolution which among other things made the release of the Ali brothers and other *fatwa* prisoners a condition precedent to the holding of a Round Table Conference.

The matter did not end there. After withdrawing from the Conference, Nair indited a letter to the *Times of India* making known his conclusion that “any further conference with Mr. Gandhi and his followers is useless and that he (Gandhi) will not be a party to what I consider an honourable settlement or that any settlement will be faithfully carried out”.<sup>115</sup> This act of Nair was strongly resented by the public whose cause he had injured. His behaviour cost Sankaran Nair the long-standing friendship of Kasturiranga Iyengar who, after much deliberation, wrote an editorial in his paper condemning both Nair's unjust pronouncements at the Con-

ference and his “ferocious” letter to the *Times of India*. The editor of *The Hindu* charged him also with having “gravely erred in accepting to act as President with the functions of a Speaker—a position which required him to remain uncommittal and regulate the proceedings of the Conference. . . . Mr. Sankaran Nair grossly misconstrued the duties attaching to that position. . . .”<sup>116</sup> Sankaran Nair, who was one of the purchasers and partners of *The Hindu* along with Kasturiranga Iyengar, parted company with that paper. When Gandhiji was questioned about the whole episode, he attributed it to “sheer cussedness”.<sup>117</sup>

Nair’s British friends were all plaudits for him on his achievement. Willingdon, in particular, agreed with every word he uttered. He wanted the Government of India to treat Gandhiji and his followers as revolutionaries. He stated that the Moderates and the loyal citizens of India would have thought poorly of the Viceroy whom they saw confer with “a man who openly says he wants to clear us out”.<sup>118</sup> He regretted that Gandhiji had two immediate advantages. One was the presence in India of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales which rendered the Viceroy “inoperative”. The second was the huge deficits the Indian and local Governments would incur that year (1922) which would help “Gandhiji to have us financially on our backs”, through his well-organised No-tax campaign.<sup>119</sup>

Quick on the heels of the events at Bombay came out a book by Sankaran Nair entitled *Gandhi and Anarchy*. It was first published on 10 March 1922 and later a publisher from Madras brought out a second enlarged and revised edition of the book. However, trouble started with the institution of a suit against the author by Michael O’Dwyer claiming damages for alleged libel. *Gandhi and Anarchy* should have been a god-send to the Government of India: it was a book by an Indian against an Indian who was emerging as a powerful national leader, a challenge to British authority in India. The book also contained material against Michael O’Dwyer which he considered defamatory and so instituted a libel suit against Nair. This material against O’Dwyer could turn out to be invidiously and vicariously damaging to the image of the British. If the book was used by the Government of India against Gandhiji, it might boomerang on them thanks to what it had to say about the ex-Lt. Governor of the Punjab. Hence the Government discreetly decided not to use the book for propaganda purposes. The local Governments were accordingly informed of the decision.<sup>120</sup>



While tendering evidence in this famous O'Dwyer *versus* Nair case, Nair deposed in London in May 1924, that he was asked to meet Gandhiji at the Round Table Conference to discuss a number of matters and that "after those events he was asked to write a pamphlet dealing with Gandhi's policy".<sup>121</sup> There was a spate of questions in the Legislative Assembly on Nair's deposition. The Government of India flatly denied Nair's version about the origins of his book. It maintained that it had nothing to do with the book except furnishing Nair at his own request, official reports of certain debates in the Imperial Council, newspaper reports and proceedings of certain Provincial Legislatures.<sup>122</sup>

As for the libel case against Nair, the judgment was a foregone conclusion. The Jury brought a verdict against Nair and Justice McCardie agreed with it. The plaintiff was awarded damages for £500. The trial was thus a "hideous mockery".<sup>123</sup> Deeply distressed about Sankaran Nair's proved loyalty getting no justice, Gandhiji stated that "Sir Sankaran Nair has the sympathy of every Indian in his defeat. . . . As the case dragged along its weary length, I admired Sir Sankaran Nair's pluck in fighting a forlorn cause. He has provided one more powerful count in the indictment against the present rule which must be ended at any cost".<sup>124</sup>

The Working Committee of the Congress accepted the terms laid down at the Bombay Conference for the proposed Round Table discussion. C.R. Reddy, who played a crucial role at the Bombay conference and put up an able defence of the resolution, was very optimistic of the Government's intentions. But it became evident that the Government would not concede them. The Government brushed Reddy and his associates aside as "dupes of Mr. Gandhi".<sup>125</sup> The British Press also declared itself against the conference. As expected, the Anglo-Indian Press also followed suit. Gandhiji wrote to the Viceroy offering to suspend the proposed "No-tax campaign" in Bardoli provided the latter accepted the Bombay conference demand for a Round Table Conference; released all persons imprisoned for peaceful activities; and abandoned its policy of repression.<sup>126</sup> But the Government paid no heed to Gandhiji's offer. Persecution of non-co-operators and gagging of their organs continued. Reading proved no better than his predecessor in succumbing to the dictates of his Provincial lieutenants like Willingdon. In its *communique* of 6 February, the Government rejected all the demands made by Gandhiji. On 7 February Gandhiji sent a rejoinder cataloguing certain acts of

official lawlessness and barbarism to the Government from Bardoli where he had gone to lead the mass civil disobedience. The very next morning Gandhiji came to know through newspapers about the disturbances on 5 February in Chauri Chaura. He was profoundly shaken. In this village in Gorakhpur district in U.P., an angry mob set fire to a Police Station in retaliation for police atrocities on them. Twenty one Constables and a Sub-Inspector of Police were burnt alive.

*Non-co-operation called off:*

The Chauri-Chaura tragedy impelled Gandhiji to cry a halt to the Non-co-operation Movement. Characterising the tragedy as a divine warning, he wrote most tellingly that God being abundantly kind to him warned him in 1919 when the Rowlatt agitation was started. Mob violence erupted in many places and he retraced his steps calling it a Himalayan miscalculation. The second time God gave a more severe warning in November 1921 through the events of Bombay. Thereupon he stopped the mass civil disobedience movement. Before the third and bitterest humiliation came, Madras gave the warning "but I heeded it not. But God spoke clearly through Chauri Chaura".<sup>127</sup>

Actually, the Chauri Chaura catastrophe was the proverbial last straw. Gandhiji perceived and understood the Chauri-Chaura tragedy not as an isolated accident but as an unmistakable symptom of the unpredictable mood of the masses. He intuitively understood that the Indian masses were not yet ready for his experiments with Satyagraha of which non-co-operation was a form. Jawaharlal Nehru attests to Gandhiji's uncanny intuition for gauging the mood of the masses and abruptly crying a halt to his satyagraha experiments. Though Gandhiji took his decisions on intuition, he would try to "clothe his decisions with reasons" for the sake of his "surprised and resentful colleagues".<sup>128</sup>

The Congress Working Committee meeting at Bardoli on 11 and 12 February 1922 suspended the Non-co-operation Movement which included the Bardoli No-Tax Campaign. Congressmen were asked to end all activities designed to court arrest and imprisonment. They were also asked to drop forthwith all volunteer processions and public meetings called merely for the purpose of defiance of notifications. Many were disappointed and some were annoyed. Many leaders who were undergoing imprisonment sent



indignant letters to Gandhiji. Motilal Nehru said it was illogical to penalize a town at the foot of the Himalayas because a village at Cape Comorin had failed to observe non-violence.<sup>129</sup> But beneath all these momentary outbursts there was this general feeling that it was India's unique good fortune to have its agitational leader "in a Gandhiji and not in a De Valera".<sup>130</sup>

Gandhiji was arrested on 10 March 1922 and sentenced to six years' simple imprisonment on a charge of sedition by the Bombay Government with the concurrence of the Government of India. In a message to the nation on the eve of his arrest, Gandhiji stated that the best honour that the nation could do him would be to keep exemplary peace during the period of his incarceration.<sup>131</sup>

Certain facts gleaned from the correspondence of Willingdon and Reading who were on terms of high intimacy are revealing. They deserve reproduction. As early as 1 March 1922, Reading wrote to Willingdon gleefully that, as anticipated, his Executive Council had unanimously decided that proceedings should be taken against Mahatma Gandhi and that notice to that effect had been sent to the Bombay Government. The Viceroy's own words for refusing to grant Gandhiji an interview were: "...A curious feature arose almost as soon as you had left. A request was made by Malaviya for an interview to which my Private Secretary, without reference to me but with knowledge of my views, replied that I was overwhelmingly busy and could not grant it. After my last interview with him, I decided that interviews should come to an end, as their continuance might be misconstrued. . . . Many of the most prominent leaders of the Non-co-operation Movement are already in prison. Proceedings now about to be started against Gandhiji will make the position quite plain. No declaration of policy is needed; the arrest speaks for itself, and it will be made by the Bombay Government. *You may rely upon my full support in any action you may have to take in suppressing the spread of sedition and other illegalities of non-co-operationists.*\*

"It is a great satisfaction to me to feel that you and I are in complete agreement upon this policy. . . . Although this is a private letter, you are at liberty to make any statement to your Executive Council and Ministers regarding the policy which you may think fit based upon this letter".<sup>132</sup>

The treatment meted out to Gandhiji at the yervada prison left

\* Italicized by the author.

much to be desired. During his interview with Gandhiji on April 1922, Rajaji found that he was being treated as a common prisoner and that he had lost weight. He also notified that Gandhiji was standing throughout the interview while the Jail Superintendent was seated. Rajaji also said that after the fine words uttered by Justice Broomfield at the famous trial at Ahmedabad everyone expected the Bombay Government to “treat the great prisoner if not exactly as he deserved or as we would want, at least as civilised Governments would treat their more important prisoners of war.... Our interview, however, rudely awakened us to the realities of the British Indian administration”.<sup>133</sup>

After his interview with Gandhiji, Rajaji gave in *Young India* an account of the indignities suffered by Gandhiji.<sup>134</sup> Thereupon, P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer wrote to William Vincent about the alleged ill-treatment accorded to Gandhiji in Jail. Stating that he had no leanings towards Gandhism, he wrote that Rajaji’s account produced in him an impression of an “undue severity which contrasted unfavourably with the extremely dignified conduct of the Sessions Judge (Broomfield) who tried and sentenced him”. P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer desired William Vincent to look into the matter to avoid unnecessary harshness if there would be no “insuperable objection” on account of its being a provincial subject.<sup>135</sup>

Gandhiji was, however, released long before the expiry of his term.

#### *Non-co-operation and Non-Brahman leaders :*

The non-Brahman party—the loyalist party which worked the Reforms, was largely responsible in setting a limit to the spread of the Non-co-operation Movement. Its leaders held anti-non-co-operation meetings in the strongholds of non-co-operation. Willingdon’s Government was deeply indebted to their propaganda which proved “more effective in combating the Movement than any propaganda from the official source”.<sup>136</sup>

So profound was the hatred of the ruling Justice party for the non-co-operators that even after the Movement was called off, it refused to do anything towards the release of the convicts. They were treated worse than the Mappilla rebels convicted for serious criminal offences; for, the sentences of the latter were either remitted or reduced by the Government. Some members of the Ministerialist party said that the non-co-operators in jails were enjoying jail life at the expense of the poor tax-payers. One member wanted the non-



co-operators to prostrate at the feet of the "mighty (British) Government that stood for peace, law and order".<sup>137</sup>

Any motion on non-co-operation, even if it was tabled by members who were not non-co-operators, was mercilessly defeated in the Council. On 13 September 1922 Biswanath Das Mahasayo, B. Muniswamy Naidu, B. Shiva Rao and Krishna Rao Pantulu moved similar resolutions bearing on the conviction of the non-co-operators under Sections 107, 144 and 188 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Since the non-co-operators did not defend themselves in a Court of Law, it was incumbent upon the convicting magistrate to see that the best possible evidence was collected and adduced by the prosecution. But experience showed that what was done was distinctly the reverse. The evidences of the police, Village Officers, and sometimes of men who were regarded as the sediments of society, were entertained. As for the police they were themselves the prosecutors; as for the Village Officers they were more or less taken as Government Officers. So the aforementioned Members of the Madras Legislative Council wanted the papers relating to all those who were convicted during the Movement (including those still in jail), to be referred to a Bench of two Judges of the High Court of Judicature, Madras, for revision.<sup>138</sup>

After a good deal of opposition from men like A. Ramaswamy Mudaliar and Somasundaram Pillai, the resolution was reduced in the end to asking for not so much as a judicial interference on the part of the High Court but a mere examination by the Government of these cases with the help of a non-official Committee. That would enable them to find out where the idiosyncracies of the individual officers offended judicial propriety and to correct them immediately so that the Government might save itself from the "accumulating bad reputation". The motion was lost.<sup>139</sup>

It would be relevant to reproduce excerpts from the speech of A. Ramaswamy Mudaliar attacking the non-co-operators most scathingly. He also fumed at those members who desired to help a "set of prisoners" whose creed was subversive of all discipline, of all established law and order, and which cut at the very root of everything including "the very goal of *Swaraj* or Dominion self-Government". According to their creed, he said, the British Courts of Justice were a sham and the whole system of the administration of justice a huge farce. The non-co-operators "cannot let in evidence; they cannot defend themselves; they cannot cross examine witnesses. According to that creed they cannot even employ vakils.

If vakils . . . fly after them and are over-solicitous in offering their services free and undertake to help them, that creed sacred, sacrosanct, hallowed, inviolable comes in their way and they say 'we cannot have your services'." The presiding judge "has to try a prisoner who non-co-operates with him at every stage, who refuses to recognise the majesty of law, who declines to see in the presiding judge the arbiter of right and wrong, . . . who has a supreme contempt for every procedure of the judiciary and has not even concealed his utter contempt for the gentleman who presides on the bench. . . .

"Have my friends (who want a committee to be constituted) any mandate from the non-co-operating prisoners, or from the non-co-operators in general? Have the latter authorised them to move in their behalf? . . . They (non-co-operators) say they have nothing to do with the Satanic Government; nothing to do with our law courts and yet my friends are overflowing with the milk of human kindness and sympathy which wells up from their hearts and are seeking to help these gentlemen. . . . We shall be stultifying ourselves, we shall be stultifying the position of the Government, we shall be stultifying the position of every man who has any respect for himself or for the institutions of the country, if we now come forward of our own accord without any call from these non-co-operators . . . and say to them we are ready and eager to come to their help even if they spurn us".<sup>140</sup>

### *Madras Mill Riots:*

The following pages comprise a brief discussion on two disturbances that occurred in the Presidency in 1920 and 1921. Both were of a very different nature—one a labour unrest in Madras City and the other a communal riot in far off Malabar. Neither had anything to do with the Non-co-operation Movement. But Willingdon's Government had an astounding knack of tracing the origin of both evils to the non-co-operator and his "insidious" propaganda. Because some of the leaders of the Labour Movement in the Presidency were non-co-operators, any labour trouble was attributed to the Non-co-operation Movement. The existence of the Madras Labour Union which was the first of its kind in India, was a nightmare to the Government, particularly during the post-war period with its attendant evils of political discontent and unsettled economic conditions. They would therefore resort to any



method to kill the Trade Union Movement which was organised by B.P. Wadia of the Theosophical Society in 1918\* and was growing rapidly alongside of the political struggle for freedom. The Madras Labour Union consisted of the workers of the textile mills there. The Government was also agitated over the attitude of some of the British friends of India who evinced active interest in its labour problems. Col. Wedgewood who visited Madras in the first week of January 1921 after attending the Nagpur Congress interviewed labourers. He also took a leading part in a labour meeting held at the beach, under the chairmanship of Kasturiranga Iyengar who championed the cause of labour emphasising co-partnership between labour and capital. The Government called their efforts a fiasco since they failed to bring out a "better understanding between labourers and employers".<sup>141</sup>

Even a minor strike on the part of the employees of the cording department of the Carnatic Mills in May 1921 was given a political slant. When there was a major strike in the Buckingham Mill in June 1921, they unhesitatingly hit out against the Union charging its leaders with having deliberately induced the workers to go on a strike in sympathy with the employees of the Carnatic Mill.<sup>142</sup>

The workers of the Buckingham Mill were discontented with their lot and were in an agitated mood since January 1921. Their discontent erupted into a serious disturbance by the end of June when about 12,000 labourers went on a strike. But their action was far from illegal—their principal demand being an increase in their wages. The European owners of the Mill did not realise that high prices resulting in labour unrest was a legacy of the economic strain of the First World War. Enraged at the behaviour of the labourers, they declared a lock-out, throwing the labour force out of work. In the wake of the lock-out, attempts were made on behalf of the Mill to segregate from the Labour Union one section of the agitators, the Adi-Dravidas, to whom police protection was extended. Its sequel was a clash between these black legs and the strikers—which became known as the "Pulianthope troubles". There were molestation, stoning, knifing and even bomb-throwing in the areas around the mill such as Choolai, Purasawalkam and Vepery which soon came under Martial Law administration. Even firing was resorted to in August 1921, with fatal casualties. Ulti-

\*The Mill Hands' Association formed in Bombay in 1890 was not organised on the lines of Trade Union.

mately, the Government settled the dispute by intimidation and conveniently explained away its tactics by making the non-co-operators the scapegoat. But the sequence of developments proved that the Government acted purely out of spite.

Until the lock-out, the entire labour force comprising all castes and communities—the Caste-Hindus, the Adi-Dravidas as well as the Muslims were working in unison. The demand of the strikers being most legitimate and humanitarian, the Government ought to have acted quickly and hammered out a solution so as to restore normalcy in the Mill. But they did not do so. A legitimate labour agitation for higher wages was manipulated into a caste warfare by segregating one part of the hitherto united body of workers from the rest. This was done intentionally to destroy the discipline and unity of the Labour Union.

In its capacity as the protector of the depressed classes, the Labour Department approached the Adi-Dravidas who constituted about half of the 5,620 mill-hands employed there, and advised them to cut themselves away from the rest of the Labour force.<sup>143</sup> The department fed and maintained the Adi-Dravidas and even escorted them to the Mill daily. The Labour Department took another reprehensible step of helping the Mill owners recruit fresh labour for their mills. Having succeeded in setting up one caste against the rest and in accentuating the line of cleavages, the Government stooped to charge the non-co-operators with fomenting labour unrest. It was reported that Congress volunteers who were “recruited from the dregs of society, majority being loafers and rowdies”, carried on the nefarious campaign of hate against the capitalists and Government.<sup>144</sup> This was an obvious reference to the resolution passed at a meeting at the Triplicane Beach under the presidency of Kasturiranga Iyengar. Iyengar was made a member of the Committee to protect the Mill workers against violence and other troubles. Strongly defending the cause of the labour, the meeting resolved to extend all help to the workers of the Mill in their fight against capitalists; to sustain them during the period of strike; and also to condemn the attitude of the Government which attributed the labour strike to the Congress policy of non-co-operation. Kasturiranga Iyengar gave a donation of 500 rupees for the Strikers’ Relief Fund.<sup>145</sup>

The action of the Adi-Dravidas in going back to the Mill against the unwritten law of the Labour Union to which they were also a party, had serious consequences. The rest of the Labour force



bitterly divided along communal lines went on a rampage. There were disorders and riots and several huts of the non-caste Mill workers were burnt on five successive days from 29 June and the fire brigades were attacked by the enraged strikers. Three policemen were shot, one of them dying on the spot. Some 1700 Adi-Dravidas abandoned their homes on 2 July for a special camp at Vyasarpadi under the protection of the Commissioner of Labour and the Police.<sup>146</sup>

The Government then requisitioned troops from the Fort. The irate labourers carried knives to inflict personal injury not only on the Adi-Dravidas who were considered black-legs but on innocent wayfarers not in any way connected with the mills. These were acts of incendiarism in which some Anglo-Indian employees were also assaulted.<sup>147</sup> There was thus insecurity to life and property in a considerable part of Madras round the Mill area. To add insult to injury, the Governor after returning from the Ooty hills inspected the Adi-Dravida locality and announced a big donation to compensate for the losses sustained by them during the riots. Promises were made to build new houses for those whose dwellings were burnt. This only strengthened the lurking impression that Willingdon was also inclined towards the Adi-Dravidas.<sup>148</sup> The Governor denounced labour leaders of the stature of B.P. Wadia, B. Shiva Rao, V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, Kumaraswamy Chetty, A.S. Ramulu, E.L. Iyer, M. Singaravelu and V. Chakkarai Chetty as demagogues and political adventurers and intimidated them with deportation.<sup>149</sup> It was even talked in Government circles that the outrages indulged in by the labourers were caused by the disappointment that Gandhiji's promise of *Swaraj* did not materialise.

Willingdon interdicted the Legislative Council from discussing the matter which was causing grave anxiety in many homes in Madras. At the commencement of the proceedings the Council did grant leave to discuss the adjournment motion of S. Srinivasa Iyengar who wanted to discuss the shooting episode. But later, the Governor intervened to disallow it. It was an abuse of power. The only avenue public had under the Reformed Constitution to ventilate its grievances—the Legislative Council—was gagged and was prevented from voicing its opinion in a matter of burning public importance. O. Thanikachalam Chetty, the Justice party member made a spirited protest against this attempt of Willingdon to play “a minatory deputy Providence”.<sup>150</sup> Thus even the sup-

porters of his "happy family" refused to countenance Willingdon's policy in dealing with the labour troubles. The attitude of some of the Justicites exasperated Willingdon so much that at the Sheriff's banquet in October 1921, he coupled the non-Brahmans with the non-co-operators and admonished both. He temporarily fell out with the non-Brahman party in the Legislative Council and the leaders of the party to whom the Governor was constitutionally responsible in a sense sent him a strongly worded note condemning his policy.<sup>151</sup>

Subsequently in October 1921 the matter was taken up for discussion at the Council when O. Thanikachalam Chetty brought a resolution inviting the attention of the Government to the grave situation prevailing in the mill areas. In the course of a lengthy speech openly accusing the Government of irresponsibility, Thanikachalam Chetty bluntly said that the Government had acted without imagination and initiative. He also stated that not a single Adi-Dravida was shot during the disturbance for the simple reason that they were not in the riot-torn area being well-protected by the Government.<sup>152</sup>

The depressed classes representative M. C. Rajah asserted that the contrary was the truth. He said that even before the strike was declared, they met on 19 June 1921 at Pulianthope and decided not to join the strike which the labourers were then contemplating on. They, in a body, wrote to the President of the labour Union, that their extreme poverty with no other means of livelihood than what they earned in the mills, prevented them from joining the strike. They had already suffered considerable financial hardship during the earlier strike organised by Wadia when they had to part with what little property they had. Rajah then became the mouthpiece of the administration and carped at the non-co-operators whose only object according to him was to render governance impossible. He even averred that Thanikachalam Chetty's assertion that the Government sided with the Adi-Dravidas was not shared by the other members of the Justice party. If that was the view of the party itself, "We have no option but to cut ourselves aloof from that party", he said.<sup>153</sup>

None could dispute the statement about the penurious plight of the Adi-Dravidas or their own discretion to extend or not to extend their support to the agitators crying for more wages. It was the Government that had erred egregiously and the members were absolutely right in taking it to obloquy. It was expected of the



Government to render all help to the labour as a whole observing complete neutrality. But the Madras Government chose to side with one particular section and stoked thereby caste feelings. One member aptly recalled: "Only the other day the British Cabinet sanctioned £15 millions in aid of the suffering labourers and look at the piteous sight of (our) Government helping the mill owners of Madras to bring back the labourers who only plead for a high wage!"<sup>154</sup>

If the Labour department was responsible for the origin of the trouble, the Police department was responsible for aggravating it by their signal failure to bring it under control. It was beyond one's comprehension as to how the police could have bungled the situation necessitating troops to be called in to combat the forces of disorder. More ridiculous than this was the action of the Governor who not only defended but even expressed his "fullest confidences" in them. Lionel Davidson, Home Member of the Governor's Executive Council, congratulated the police on their "magnificent conduct".<sup>155</sup>

The role of the police in the Mill riots became a subject of great controversy. It was adversely commented upon by a bold and outspoken Chief Presidency Magistrate who since became a *persona non grata* with the administration which transferred him to another sphere of activities.<sup>156</sup> The non-Brahmans in the legislature charged them with turning a blind eye to violence by the Adi-Dravidas and failing to protect the lives and property of caste Hindus and Muslims.<sup>157</sup> The *Independent* of Allahabad published a scathing article captioned *Peace and Disorder*, wherein the Commissioner of Police, Madras, was charged with having gone out with the Assistant Commissioners and Inspectors not to guard lorries or to prevent breaches of peace during the strikes, but to shoot and kill and teach the labourers a lesson. The charge was underlined in the last paragraph of the article wherein it was asked: "How long are officials to be encouraged to sustain peace and order by terrorism and murder"?<sup>158</sup> The Government of India which had always considered *Independent* a very bad paper became very furious. It advised the Government of Madras to instruct the Commissioner of Police to prosecute the Editor of the paper for criminal defamation under Section 500 of the Indian Penal Code or to bring a suit against him or the paper or both for civil damages.<sup>159</sup> However the publisher of the paper, C.S. Ranga Iyer, a non-co-operator, then in the Agra jail, tendered an apology to the Madras Commissioner of Police and

caused it to be prominently published in the same paper.<sup>160</sup> This brought the matter to a close. But the enquiry committee set up under William Ayling was critical of the Commissioner of Police as well as the Chief Presidency Magistrate for their inaction and found the city police “woefully inadequate to deal with the disturbances.”<sup>161</sup>

### *The Mappilla Rebellion:*

The Mappilla rebellion refers to the heinous atrocities perpetrated by the Mappillas on the Hindus of the Malabar district in August 1921. It had no relation whatsoever to the Non-co-operation Movement except that it occurred when that Movement was at its zenith. But the British Government did its best to implicate the Gandhian movement in the rebellion. In other words, the rebellion provided them with one more example of Indian “communalism” which was often used in “British propaganda”.<sup>162</sup> There was actually a frenzied alarm in England at the progress of the Non-co-operation Movement in India. The Mappilla unrest afforded them an opportunity to reinforce their age-old argument that in view of the violence of crimes, the Secretary of State should reconsider the advisability of granting “Dominion Home Rule” to India. Earlier, at the House of Lords, during a long debate, Sydenham stated that the Mappilla episode had demonstrated conclusively that the Indians were unfit for the new constitution.<sup>163</sup>

The Mappillas—a small group which inhabited the Malabar Coast—were perhaps the earliest converts to Islam in South India. They were a ferocious and fanatical tribe who now and then ran amok killing the Hindus they sighted in the surrounding areas. There were no fewer than two scores of such bloody episodes since the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>164</sup> But the Mappilla rebellion that broke out at Tirurangadi on 20 August 1921 was unprecedented in its swiftness and scale of devastation. But it would be unwise to ascribe political motives to the rebellion. Fanatic to the core, the Mappilla rebels were never permeated by national consciousness. Violence being their creed, they had nothing to do with the struggle for *Swaraj* or for Gandhiji who preached non-violence. They had in truth, an unconcealed contempt for Gandhiji and *ahimsa* and zealously kept themselves away from the Congress and the *Khilafat* movement.

The genesis of the rebellion lay in the provocation caused by Thomas, the District Magistrate of Malabar. He was informed that



war knives had been stored in the mosque in kizhakkappalli mosque in Tirurangadi in contravention of the Malabar Offensive Weapons Act XX of 1854. On hearsay evidence he besieged the mosque "as if it were an enemy's fort". He thus disrupted the daily religious ritual routines of the fanatical Mappillas. This siege was a sacrilege in their eyes. The news of the "desecration" of the mosque spread like wild fire. The enraged tribals took to indiscriminate killing of the Hindus. Thus, the origins of the rising had nothing to do with the Non-co-operation Movement. Particularly on the inhabitants of Tirurangadi which had earned considerable notoriety as a fertile and breeding ground of fanaticism, the Non-co-operation Movement had made very little impact. This was vouched by the non-official report of the Committee appointed by the Madras Provincial Congress Committee. This committee visited the riot torn areas immediately after the incident. But the Madras Government which imputed the origins of the rebellion to the "dark machination" of the non-co-operator could adduce no credible evidence in support of this charge. Nevertheless its propaganda gained a strong ground. Even historians, not excluding Indians, subscribed to this view and foisted the blame for the rebellion squarely on the non-co-operators. They accused Gandhiji of forming a covert *entente* with the Muslim leaders and welding the mutual grievances between the Hindus and the Muslims into a subversive agitation against the British Government.

The most cruel act of the Government in suppressing the rebellion was the extreme penalty meted out to the non-co-operator M.P. Narayana Menon for alleged involvement in the rebellion. Menon, who was a law graduate of the Madras University, practised as a pleader in Malabar. In 1921, he joined the Congress movement and became a non-co-operator. During the Mappilla disturbance he was first imprisoned for an offence made under the Mappilla Act. This could not be maintained and he was then tried for the offence of delivering on 24 August 1921, a speech inciting to rebellion. The principal evidence for the prosecution was that of two Mappilla witnesses who were "men of low station in life". Their evidence delivered nearly a year after the alleged speech was made suggested very strongly that it was not genuine.<sup>165</sup> But the Government acted on this evidence, disregarding the greatest esteem which responsible Malabarists had for Menon. He was sentenced to imprisonment for life and was in the Madras penitentiary.

Countless number of telegrams and representations were re-

ceived by both the Governor and the Viceroy urging the release of Menon; and resolutions were moved in the Provincial Council as well as the Central Legislature. C.F. Andrews made a verbal representation to the Viceroy in November 1925.<sup>166</sup> When Viceroy Reading sought clarification, Governor Goschen wrote that the result of his own researches in the matter had driven him to the deliberate conclusion that "Menon was one of the chief instigators of the (Mappilla) rebellion . . . and had been justly punished".<sup>167</sup> Menon rejected the Government's conditional offer to release him if he gave an undertaking to abstain from politics in future as that would amount to his admission of an offence which he did not commit. It was only in 1934 that Menon was released.

The Government of Madras was not content with foisting the blame for the rebellion on the non-co-operators. It tended to shirk its responsibility by dismissing even legitimate criticisms of its actions as the "wicked bragging of the demagogues" bent upon "making political capital out of trivial happenings" and use them as "propaganda" to lower its prestige.<sup>168</sup> The Government's irresponsiveness in the case of the appalling Mappilla train tragedy bears an eloquent testimony to this tendency.

The revolting incident occurred on 21 November 1921 when Mappilla prisoners numbering hundred who were bound for the Bellary jail, were put in a closed iron luggage wagon at Tirur. At Podanur junction (near Coimbatore) it was found that 56 of the passengers were simply allowed to die of asphyxiation in the cold month of November while others were in an unconscious state. Of the rest, eight more died in the hospital. This nefarious practice of despatching prisoners in ill-ventilated luggage vans which Gandhiji called "Death Wagon" was condemned everywhere. The *Daily Mail*, a leading journal in England wrote while commenting on the lamentable disaster: "The atrocity was committed by some man clothed in the authority of Britain with the result that in native eyes we stand guilty of an infamy as vile as the Black Hole of Calcutta. The man responsible must immediately be identified, brought to trial without delay and hanged promptly. Nothing else will satisfy our many pledges to India".<sup>169</sup>

Criticisms made no dent on the Government. Knapp, the Special Commissioner of Malabar who ought to have been at the "witness box" was given the President's seat on the four-man investigation committee appointed by the Government. The Committee concluded that the disaster was the result of "circumstances"



and that none could be blamed for the accidental defect in the wagon. The policemen who accompanied the prisoners were prosecuted but discharged by the Government. Deprecating the verdict of the Committee, R.K. Shanmukham Chetty said in his devastating speech at the Legislative Council that the public could be pardoned for feeling that the Committee was "one of those white washing committees which is meant to invent a theory rather than elucidate the facts".<sup>170</sup>

Much more tragic than the tragedy itself was the fact that in the Legislative Council of Madras, Justices like P. T. Chetty, Mohammad Usman and O. Thanikachalam Chetty disagreed with the exposures made by R.K. Shanmukham Chetty of their own party merely to toe the line of the Government. However, there was one definite gain to the Mappilla prisoners from this tragedy. More human treatment was meted out to them by the authorities thereafter. Rajaji wrote to Gandhiji, "The Moplas are now going in Third class compartments with only bars in the windows. We see constables giving water and even running about for it at some stations. The crucifixion of the seventy has not been in vain. Thousands of Moplahs have since had human treatment".<sup>171</sup>

In the Mappilla outrage, the Government did nothing beyond crushing it to enforce law and order. Yet, the British Indian administration gloried in calling itself the defender of the rights of the poor in India. The rights of which community of the poor they safeguarded remained a mystery. During the Mappilla outbreak the Government said they were holding India only to protect the defenceless Hindus from the belligerent Muslims who would overrun India and annihilate the peaceful Hindus once the British left India. In the same breath, they also said that Muslims being anti-Nationalists remained loyal to the British! "From which one is left to conclude that the Hindus are clamouring to be killed whilst the Moslems are begging the British to stay and keep them from committing murder".<sup>172</sup>

It was already seen that the Non-co-operation Movement was called off in April 1922, following the Chauri Chaura calamity. But this did not mean that the spirit of non-co-operation with the British Government had died down. Even the enemies of the Movement who often exaggerated the split in the ranks of the Congress, understood that the spirit of non-co-operation was astir. They also understood that till the goal of *Swaraj* was reached, the Satyagrahis would not rest. Of course, in giving Gandhiji the sole credit for a

Movement which demonstrated the power of non-violence there was difference of opinion. But the alien Government had to accept two home truths: the Indian patriots were aflame with passion for *Swaraj*; the Government could not long resist the spirit of the times.

To some, the Movement was pure Gandhian. To others, it was the natural result of "distrust of foreign government, and longing to be quit of it (sic) and an unwillingness to work with it even for the common good".<sup>173</sup> J.T. Gwynne, ICS, who was intimately associated with the Indian district administration for over a decade and who gave up his lien on a collectorship to become the Special Correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* wrote that all classes of people—the educated, the townsfolk and the villagers were permeated with the spirit of non-co-operation though in varying degrees. He wrote, "It is often among the best men that this spirit of non-co-operation is strongest. You find it among the best of the Moderates. They differ from the non-co-operators only in this: that they have a deep dislike for revolutionary methods. But this dislike is not shared by the country at large; it is felt only by men of exceptional experience or exceptional powers of imagination. The country as a whole is more in sympathy with the rashness of the non-co-operators than with the prudence of the Moderates".<sup>174</sup>

The British made teetotalism and home-spinning a crime when they talked of putting down non-co-operation. Evenso, temperance crusade and boycotting and even burning British goods went on, demonstrating clearly that the alien Government could hold India in bondage only on the strength of its *abkari* revenue and on the strength of its exploitation of India through Lancashire.<sup>175</sup>

And in the case of the Madras Presidency, the Government was obviously trading upon the disunion between the Brahmans and the non-Brahmans. Gandhiji uttered the plain truth about the Madras Government when he said at a meeting at Bezwada when the Non-co-operation Movement was in its full swing: "Day by day we are having ocular demonstration of the fact that this Government has no inherent strength or vitality. It derives its strength from our weakness. It thrives upon our dissensions".<sup>176</sup>



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## CHAPTER TEN

# Vaikom Satyagraha

From February 1922 when the Non-co-operation Movement was suspended till the revival of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930–31, the fire of nationalism was kept burning in the Presidency through continual propaganda for *Swaraj* by the Provincial Congress. To this propaganda should be attributed the launching of the No-tax campaign in Tanjore, the collection of *khadar* purses, the picketing of toddy-shops in various districts, the strikes in textile mills, the boycott of the Simon Commission etc.<sup>1</sup> But the most exciting event of this period was the Satyagraha launched at Vaikom which constituted a salient feature of the National Movement. This Satyagraha differed from the ones undertaken earlier in two respects. In the first place, unlike the previous struggles which aimed at breaking the political paramountcy of the British in India, the Vaikom Satyagraha fought against the social evil of untouchability. Untouchability was a curse which kept a large section of the Hindu population enslaved for centuries and offered British imperialism a weapon to fight against Indian nationalism. Secondly, whereas on earlier occasions, this non-violent resistance was offered against alien authority in British India, in the Vaikom Satyagraha, it was directed against a Hindu King.

Situated in the south westerly extremity of the Indian Peninsula, Vaikom was a place of pilgrimage in the then Travancore\* State. It leaped into limelight by becoming the seat of the first Satyagraha in South India launched in the direction of purging the Hindu Society of a disgraceful custom. It had no sanction in the *sastras*—the traditional laws governing Hindu society. The satyagraha was organised by the so-called “out-castes”. They wanted to fight against the ban which prohibited them from using the roads round or converging to the temple. It was widely though falsely believed that their shadows would pollute the pious temple goers! The struggle assumed national importance and held the entire country

\* Anglicised form of Tiru-Vitham-Kode.

in a spell of suspense and excitement for fifteen months—from March 1924 to June 1925. The Movement derived its intensity from the fact that the most enlightened and benevolent Government of Travancore which fought against all that was “too wooden, too rotten and too ante-diluvian”, chose to favour the “reactionary orthodox elements as against the advancing current of popular and more democratic thought”.<sup>2</sup> Curiously enough, the kind-hearted Maharaja\* did not recognise that this nefarious practice was no credit to Hinduism but was a serious blot on it.

Since Travancore was an Indian State, the Satyagrahis could expect no help, not even advice, from the Congress whose aim was *Swaraj* in British India. It was thus a very delicate situation prevailing in the neighbouring Princely State in which the Provincial Congress of the Madras Presidency could not, as an organisation, involve itself. However, members of the Congress could extend support to the Satyagrahis in their individual capacity. This they did in an abundant measure. Leading Congressmen like S. Srinivasa Iyengar and E. V. Ramaswami Naicker actually led the Satyagrahis in Vaikkom besides sending volunteers from various parts of the Presidency. Their active participation served to stimulate the interest and attention of all India leaders on the great evil rampant in many parts of the country.

### *Why Vaikkom?*

There was no special reason for the choice of the area. Whenever the Satyagrahis became convinced of the suitability of a particular place or time to fight a certain common evil, it was their duty to start work either by conducting a satyagraha or by any other legitimate means. Such an opportunity to launch satyagraha presented itself in Travancore. In the Kerala region of South India, the higher castes always treated the “outcastes” with haughty contempt. Swami Vivekananda once described Malabar, where even those begging for alms had to stand at a distance of about three furlongs, as a big lunatic asylum in this respect.<sup>3</sup> What caused considerable consternation to many was that the royalty of Travancore, noted for their generosity and magnanimity in many matters, should have subscribed to very orthodox views on untouchability.

The immediate cause of the agitation was an incident in Travancore when a lawyer of a “low” caste was insulted. On that fateful

\* Sree Moolam Tirunal (1885–1924).



morning Madhavan, an Ezhava lawyer, went as usual to the court which was located in the campus of the palace. That day happened to be the Maharaja's birthday and the religious ceremony was being conducted in another part of the palace. Fearing pollution from Madhavan's very approach, the orthodox sections denied him entry and arrogantly closed the gates against him. The treatment meted out to Madhavan naturally offended the Ezhava community whose leaders were supported by other leaders of standing like K.P. Kesava Menon, Secretary, District Congress Committee and Editor, *Mathrubhumi*, George Joseph, a prominent Kerala Congress leader and T.K. Madhavan, an Ezhava and Editor, *Desabhimani*. They decided to organise a satyagraha at Vaikom which was a hot bed of caste autocracy. In this citadel of orthodoxy, the untouchables and unapproachables were kept aloof and allotted places of prescribed distance. They were now determined not to rest until they gained their legitimate rights to walk on the prohibited roads by taking out on those very roads a procession of the Ezhavas, the Tiyyas and the Pulayas who constituted the "out-castes". They duly conveyed to Gandhiji their decision to conduct the satyagraha "in the most orderly way possible".<sup>4</sup> Gandhiji promptly notified his whole-hearted consent but counselled caution in an abundant measure.

Generally speaking Gandhiji was averse to Congressmen creating any complications in the Indian States whose rulers were themselves "no better circumstanced than British Indian subjects".<sup>5</sup> This attitude led to the misconstruction in some quarters that Gandhiji was partial to the authorities of the Princely States. If the Government of a Princely State refused to mete out justice to a vast body of its populace, he would not have a moment's hesitation in taking up the cudgels on behalf of the latter. The Vaikom Satyagraha, which championed the cause of the suppressed classes of Travancore who suffered the worst discrimination in the whole country proved this attitude of the Mahatma. It demonstrated clearly that for Gandhiji any ruler who defied public opinion was an alien. He readily approved the proposal to launch satyagraha at Vaikom because it was intended to obtain from the Government of Travancore the right for the "low" castes to use the roads in dispute. It was a satyagraha for social justice. If the satyagraha launched in British India attacked the whole system of Government with a view to mending or ending it, the one in Travancore was used to fight a "sacerdotal prejudice". Their intention was to show the orthodox

and bigoted among the high castes that they were in the wrong. The Satyagrahis would do it by themselves suffering in the faith that their action would ultimately "open the eyes of understanding".

If the removal of untouchability was not to remain a nominal item in the constructive programme of the Congress, effective measures had to be taken not only to tackle the reactionary orthodox elements but also to interest the public in the question of having the scourge purged. Unless and until this social evil was stamped out, there was no political emancipation for India. In the words of the satyagrahis, eradicating this abominable custom was a "reform from within". Without achieving this, "reform from without" which was being demanded vigorously on the platforms, in the Press and in the popular legislatures would be of little avail. Gandhiji did not certainly disparage the demand for "reform from without". His plea was that there was no meaning in waging a political war to win *Swaraj* when a large segment of the Hindu population was denied the most elementary social right enjoyed by every non-Hindu and even animals.<sup>6</sup> It was believed that if untouchability lost its foothold in Travancore, it would pave the way for its collapse everywhere else in India. Customs and regulations of temples in Travancore were very rigid. Even Gandhiji was denied entry into the temple at Kanya Kumari because he had crossed the seas! But he bowed to the rule and worshipped the deity standing near the flagstaff of the temple.

It was thus evident that the sole aim of the Vaikom Satyagraha was to obliterate an intolerable age-long custom and not to embarrass the Government of Travancore or to defy its lawful authority. But the *Darbar* intervened, concerned as it was with the preservation of peace. It feared that the presence of the satyagrahis on the prohibited roads endangered peace. So, instead of throwing in his might in favour of the Satyagrahis, the Maharaja sided with the minority orthodox group with police help. They erected barricades and threw a cordon round the temple. This provoked the volunteers to break the wall of prejudice, however strong and impenetrable it might be. They defied the orders of the local magistracy forbidding entry on the roads round the temple. But they did it by the most non-violent means. One of the tenets of Satyagraha was to eschew compulsion or coercion in any reform. Gandhiji, who blessed and guided the campaign, had strictly enjoined on the Satyagrahis to exercise utmost caution in fulfilling the conditions he had laid down for the conduct of the struggle. They were required



to (1) endure peacefully all suffering at the hands of both the official authorities and the ignorant orthodox high castes; (2) mobilise public opinion gradually lest the Congress workers in Kerala should by any hasty action forfeit the sympathy and support of the wide and influential public; and (3) enlist the moral support and sympathy of the liberal sections of the high castes, lest they should be driven into the opposition along with the orthodox.

Countenanced through the ages by orthodoxy, superstition, custom and authority, the evil had become not only deep-rooted but had acquired an undeserved sanctity. One had therefore to be extremely circumspect in waging the holy war against "irreligion masquerading as religion and ignorance appearing in the guise of learning".<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding the non-violent means adopted by them, many leaders including Kesava Menon were arrested and imprisoned by the Travancore Government.

Even before the Satyagraha was actually launched, Gandhiji was visited at Andheri by two Brahmans—Sivarama Iyer and Vancheswara Iyer. They told him that the roads in dispute were private property belonging to the temple to which they led and that they were in the exclusive possession of Brahman trustees who had perfect right to regulate its entry. To Gandhiji's query whether non-Brahmans had access to those roads exclusively belonging to the Brahmans, they answered in the affirmative. Gandhiji then told them unambiguously that so long as a single non-Brahman was allowed to use them, the so-called untouchables and unapproachables should also have the same right as other non-Brahmans.<sup>8</sup>

After the visit of the Brahmans, Gandhiji advised Kesava Menon to suspend the Satyagraha and to refer the entire matter to the sole arbitration of Madan Mohan Malaviya who was to visit the Satyagrahis soon<sup>9</sup>. But by then the Movement had begun. On 31 March 1924, three volunteers peacefully entered the prohibited area and were arrested and sentenced to 6 months' imprisonment. On the following day another batch of three entering the area was arrested, an orderly crowd witnessing the Satyagraha.<sup>10</sup> Congratulating the Satyagrahis over their splendid work, Gandhiji advised them to continue their work in the same tenor.<sup>11</sup>

In his letter to George Joseph who became the leader and organiser of the Movement in the place of Kesava Menon, Gandhiji advised him to let only the Hindus, on whom lay the responsibility of putting their own house in order, do the work in Vaikkom. "You can help by your sympathy and by your pen and not by offering

satyagraha", he wrote. It is necessary to recall here the resolution of the Nagpur Congress which called only the Hindu members to eliminate the curse of untouchability. Gandhiji, who was keenly following the progress of the Satyagraha and was repeatedly cheering the volunteers through the columns of *Young India*, even said that the loss of a few hundred Hindus should not be considered too great a price to achieve the freedom of the untouchables.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, in the Vaikom Satyagraha only the Hindus participated and suffered, paying off the debt they owed to their suppressed sisters and brothers. They were forbidden to accept even monetary aid from outside, particularly from non-Hindus. They were prepared to forsake their wives, their children and their all for the sake of removing the deep-rooted sin. They "stooped to conquer" which was what Gandhiji wanted them to, submitting in the process to insults and indignities. Their extreme patience and non-violence in the face of the gravest provocation annoyed even Narayana Guru, the spiritual leader of the Ezhavas who inaugurated the socio-religious reform movement in Kerala. Narayana Guru wanted the Satyagrahis to advance along the barricaded roads, scale the barricades, enter the temple and sit and dine with others.<sup>13</sup> Such "violent advice" was not in keeping with their creed; so, the Satyagrahis were almost on the verge of calling off the Satyagraha at Vaikom. But they were dissuaded from such a course inasmuch as that would amount to surrendering to violence. So long as they strictly adhered to the limits they had set for themselves in endeavouring to rid their religion of its disfiguring blot, there was no justification for calling off the strike. That apart, their immediate goal was limited to securing to the outcastes the right of passage along the roads round the temple which they held to be public.<sup>14</sup>

The Satyagrahis' aim at that stage was not temple-entry or inter-dining or any other extreme object. It was realised that, with their social habits and customs, those at the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy could not be immediately brought to the level of the other castes in the social order. They had to be educated first and redeemed from such vices as drink, superstition and other unhealthy practices they indulged in, before placing them on a footing of absolute equality with those who considered themselves above them in the material, moral and spiritual levels. If weaning the "lower" castes from the habits they were steeped in and edu-



cating and elevating them would be a hard task, harder still would be that of bringing about a radical change of heart and outlook in the “higher” castes towards their long oppressed and suppressed sisters and brothers. The caste Hindus had the least compunction in imposing on members of their own religion “humiliating and inhuman restrictions which they do not dare place on the meanest of non-Hindu religionists and they do not lay even on the lower animals”.<sup>15</sup>

The following is the report of the daily satyagraha:

“The Congress satyagraha camp situated over a mile away from the landing place is a scene of liveliness at all times of the day and night. The camp is now under the able management of Mr. Kuroor Nilakanta Nambudripad who gives his careful attention to all details such as the enlistment and training of the volunteers, the accommodation of visitors etc. The volunteers are marching daily in relays every four hours to the four gates (of the temple) and offering satyagraha in the prohibited area. As they march, they sing national songs, the most favourite of them being Bharati’s songs. The police have now put up a barricade on the western road which is the widest of the four (prohibited) roads. It would appear that the barricade has been necessitated to relieve the pressure on the police in the event of the volunteers trying to push their way forward”.<sup>16</sup>

Influenced by reactionary tendencies, the Travancore *Darbar* unfortunately favoured the party of social injustices. The *Darbar* arrested and imprisoned not only the Satyagrahis but also the leaders and workers in the Congress camp. The Maharani Regent and her Dewan Raghavaiah were appealed to end the struggle forthwith by conceding to the most modest demand of the satyagrahis. But the unbending *Darbar* became even more repressive and, at the later stages of the struggle, the Satyagrahis were practically abandoned to the tender mercies of the goondas.<sup>17</sup> So progressive and advanced a government like that of the Travancore practically abdicated their elementary function of extending to the satyagrahis protection of life and property.

On 10 April 1924, there was a new turn in the Vaikom struggle. The authorities refused to arrest the satyagrahis but prohibited them from fulfilling their vow of passing along the road by the physical obstruction of a human wall of policemen. The volunteers who were determined to meet the situation squatted on the road fasting and spinning all day, exposed to the sun. They actually rejoiced in sitting under the blazing sun, suffering torture and dis-

comfort. They had unshakable faith in the efficacy of satyagraha and believed that through these means they could get the roads opened.

Gandhiji did not approve of the fast when he was telegraphically informed of it by George Joseph. He wired back: "omit fasting but stand or squat in relays with quiet submission till arrested".<sup>18</sup> Fasting in satyagraha had well-defined limits and so could not be undertaken against a tyrant. Hence Gandhiji's advice to drop the fast. Soon after this, George Joseph was also arrested.

It was the Vaikom Satyagraha which revealed to the world for the first time the depth of the accursed practice of untouchability. The persistent non-violent conduct of the Satyagrahis, who tempered stern discipline with gentleness in their dealings with orthodox sections, showed what true satyagraha was. Indignities were perpetrated on the satyagrahis. The *Khadar* dress donned by them were torn and burnt by the goondas engaged by the authorities. The satyagrahis did not protest but simply put up with the offences because they were martyrs and were to "die clean". To quote Gandhiji, "Satyagrahis like Caesar's wife must be above suspicion".<sup>19</sup> They had also to suffer the persecution of social boycott. They were denied social amenities and were threatened with the denial of their share in the family property. They might win if they went to law but satyagrahis were forbidden from litigating for a personal wrong. Suffering at the hands of one's own kith and kin was the worst form of persecution but the satyagrahis had no right to feel dejected.

By the second week of April 1924, when most of the leaders had been picked up by the Travancore authorities, appeal was made to all India leaders to lead the Movement. It was a case where a local movement had, on reaching a critical stage, been turned into an all India movement to prevent it from dying for want of a proper lead. Rajaji wired to Gandhiji seeking his advice whether to respond or not to the appeal to him to take the lead in the wake of the arrest of George Joseph.<sup>20</sup>

Requests from George Joseph and T.R. Krishnaswamy Iyer also came to Gandhiji to send someone to lead the many satyagrahis who were cheerfully holding on in the face of the gravest provocations<sup>21</sup>. Gandhiji replied to Rajaji asking him to proceed to Vaikom not to court arrest but to regulate the Movement and to negotiate with the Dewan.<sup>22</sup> But Gandhiji was sanguine that even without leadership the Movement would continue as in Satyagraha



there was “no such thing as diplomacy and manoeuvring, as we understand the terms”. In a situation such as the one the volunteers were confronted with, leaders’ help would be invaluable in conducting negotiations but “the real suffering was the privilege of the rank and file”.<sup>23</sup> Rajaji, however, could not take the lead owing to health reasons.

Congress leaders of the Madras Presidency to whom appeals were made came readily to the rescue of the Satyagrahis. E.V. Ramasami Naicker, then President of the Tamil Nad Congress Committee, was also requested to take over the leadership of the Satyagraha\*. His sincere involvement in the Vaikkom Satyagraha earned him the title *Vaikkom Veerar* (Hero of Vaikkom) in the Tamil circles. It demonstrated clearly his abilities to fight a grave social inequality. But his activities at Vaikkom also exposed his lack of refinement in handling the masses. He cared the least for the susceptibilities of the Hindus in general when he made provocative speeches attacking Hinduism itself. The following is a sample of his highly emotional utterances:

“They argue that pollution would result if, we, untouchables passed through the streets leading to the temple. I ask them whether the Lord of Vaikkom or the so-called orthodox Brahmans would be polluted by the presence of untouchables. If they say that the presiding deity at Vaikkom temple would be polluted, then that could not be God, but a mere stone, fit only to wash dirty linen with”.<sup>24</sup> Such utterances no doubt attracted thousands of people who flocked to listen to him. But they shocked the Travancore State authorities as they would lead to caste-conflict and communal disharmony. Within a week of his arrival in Vaikkom, Ramasami Naicker was arrested and sent to one month’s imprisonment at the Arivikkuttu Jail. On his release he was served a warrant to leave the State forthwith. He defied the warrant as he did not wish to leave Travancore without completing his mission. His speeches became more provocative and earned him a second dose of six months’ rigorous imprisonment. But he was released two months earlier when the Maharani occupied the *gadi* on the death of the Maharaja. The satyagrahis too suspended the Satyagraha for the time being. On his release Naicker returned to Erode, his home town.

\* The claim of EVR that he received personal letters to this effect from George Joseph and Kesava Menon was disputed by Nilakantan Nambudri in his letter to Dr. E. Sa. Visswanathan dated January 1970. (E.Sa. Vissawanathan, *The Political Career of E.V. Ramasami Naicker*. F.N. P. 42).

But on his arrival there, he was arrested on 11 September 1924 by the Madras Government for his anti-Government speech made at the height of the *Khadar* campaign early that year. He was released within six months and this enabled him to be in Travancore when Gandhiji met the Maharani in March 1925.<sup>25</sup>

*Gandhiji's Parley with the Maharani:*

At the instance of Rajaji, Gandhiji made a whirlwind tour of Kerala in March 1925. His entire stay there was crowded with incessant journeys, interviews and public meetings at several places. He visited the Narayana Guru at Sivagiri. He exhorted the Ezhavas, who numbered about a million, and who were "as clean, as educated, and as cultured as the highest in the land", to break down the prejudice of blind orthodoxy. He wanted them to get the roads in question opened to the untouchables and unapproachables not by violence but by pressure of public opinion. It hurt his sense of religion and humanity as well as his sense of nationalism to see that Narayana Guru could not enter the prohibited roads of Vaikkom.

At Vaikkom he stayed with the satyagrahis explaining to them the true implications of the Satyagraha. He told the volunteers that the struggle they were engaged in at the moment was but a skirmish in the bigger battle they were to wage. Their immediate goal of getting the roads opened would really be the beginning of the struggle for getting all such roads throughout Travancore opened to the untouchables. During his stay in Vaikkom the attention of the entire country was focussed on the Satyagraha Movement here. Gandhiji's charisma had made a great impact.

Gandhiji had talks also with the orthodox caste Hindu oppositionists. The discussions were held at the residence of Indanthurithi Nambyathiri for over three hours. Gandhiji offered three practical proposals towards bringing the struggle to a speedy termination. The alternative proposals were: an arbitration, a referendum and an examination by select *Pandits* of the *Sankara Smritis*. Gandhiji fervently appealed to them to give the noble cause their sympathy and to co-operate in an active manner. But the leaders would accept none of these.<sup>26</sup>

At Trivandrum, Gandhiji was the guest of the Maharani Regent.\* He interviewed both the Maharani and her Dewan Raghavaiah. They appreciated Gandhiji's proposals and expressed their sym-

\* Sethu Lakshmi Bai (1924-1931).



pathy with the reformers and promised to help the reform Movement to the best of their ability. They added they would do so by measures other than legislation. Gandhiji invited them to help the Movement in obtaining a referendum. General opinion everywhere was that even if the Maharani was unable to have a referendum, she could organise public opinion to which the orthodox section would have to yield.

At the end of March 1925, Gandhiji left Travancore hopeful of the success of the satyagrahis provided, of course, they continued to be true to their faith. He was also hopeful that the Government of Travancore would take the natural step of adopting one of the suggestions made by him either with or without the concurrence of the orthodox party.<sup>27</sup> The subsequent acts of the *Darbar* justified his expectations.

In pursuance of the pact entered into between the Government of Travancore and Gandhiji, the former withdrew the prohibitory order on Vaikom satyagrahis on 13 April 1925.<sup>28</sup> The latter, for their part, undertook to respect the boundary line and continue to offer Satyagraha as heretofore. The Government in the meantime issued definite instructions to the *Devaswom* Commissioner and the District Magistrate of Kottayam to “explain to the orthodox section of the population the views of Government and endeavour to bring about a change in the outlook of that section which will accord with modern ideas”. This encouraged the hope that Dewan Raghavaiah before laying down his office would solve the vexed question. The next action of the Government did not belie this hope. In June 1925, the Maharani removed the ban on the Vaikom roads on three sides of the temple and despatched some troops to enforce the order. The *Devaswom* Commissioner also arranged to carry on the *puja* in case the priests refused to perform it as a protest against the order.<sup>29</sup> This marked the triumphal end of the Vaikom Satyagraha—which was an important milestone in the progress of social reform in Kerala.

The Vaikom Settlement which Gandhiji characterised as “flimsy” was in reality “a document between the people and the state constituting a big step in the direction of liberty”.<sup>30</sup> It paved the way for the Temple Entry Proclamation by the Travancore *Darbar* on 12 November 1936. This grand Proclamation of Freedom for Harijans was to the effect that “there should be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth on entering or worshipping at temples controlled by us and our Government”.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# Diarchy—The Beginnings And The Growth

### *First Elections (1920):*

In the Madras Presidency, the first election held in November 1920 under the Government of India Act of 1919 was fought on only one issue namely, the Brahman *versus* non-Brahman. As seen in the earlier chapters, when the Reforms Scheme was launched in the Province of Madras, communal passion was at its height. The Non-Brahman Movement itself was launched originally in opposition to the Reforms, as it was feared that more Reforms meant more political powers for the Brahmans. Later, when the Reforms became inevitable, there was an unedifying scramble for communal representation on the part of the non-Brahman leaders. When that was also not granted, the non-Brahmans fought for safeguards and succeeded in getting a certain number of seats reserved for them in the Legislative Council.

The results of the first elections held in November 1920 under the Act of 1919 proved to the hilt that the non-Brahmans needed no special protection. The Congress dissociated itself from the elections declaring that *Swaraj* must be won by adopting the technique of non-violent non-co-operation within a period of one year. The Congress' dissociation coupled with the expansion of the electorate provided the non-Brahmans the finest opportunity to break Brahman dominance in the Legislature. The Justice party emerged victorious easily securing a large majority. Governor Willingdon following the best constitutional precedent, called upon P.T. Chetty, the leader of the Justice party, to form the Ministry. The Wealthy Chetty did not himself accept office as his salary would be provided by the taxes. It was against his policy to live on people's money.<sup>1</sup> Nor was he enamoured of power. He therefore recommended that A. Subbarayalu Reddy\*, Ramarayanagar (later Raja of Panagal) and K. Venkatareddy Naidu be in-

\* From Cuddalore (South Arcot); Lawyer; Landlord; Chairman of Municipal Council and Temple Committee; and President, Taluk Board.

ducted as the Ministers. Willingdon accordingly made Subbarayalu Reddy, the Chief Minister. He was assigned the portfolio of Education. The second and third became respectively, the Ministers for Local Self-Government and Development. All the three were non-Brahmans and were Telugus.\* When Subbarayalu Reddy resigned his Chief Ministership on grounds of health, Willingdon appointed A.P. Patro\*\* a Minister, elevating Ramarayaningar to Chief Ministership. A.P. Patro was also a Telugu non-Brahman. Thus, unlike other Provinces, the Madras Legislative Council patently started on communal lines. It was “inevitable under the circumstances”.<sup>2</sup>

The first Legislative Council of 127 members had a large majority of 98 elected members. The Governor added 29 more by nomination. Among these, 11 were officials. This panel of 11 officials included the 4 Executive Councillors who were to act as spokesmen for their respective departments. The remaining 18 non-officials were nominated by the Governor in order to ensure representation in the Council to those sections of the population which would not otherwise secure representation. The final composition of the Council of 1920 by (1) race or caste and (2) party was as follows:

COMPOSITION OF THE COUNCIL OF 1920 BY RACE OR CASTE

Race or Community	Elected	Nominated & Ex-officio	Total
Brahmans	17	5	22
Non-Brahmans	Hindus	8	65
Depressed Classes		5	5
Mohammadans	13	1	14
Indian Christians	5	1	6
Europeans and Anglo-Indians	6	9	15
Total	98	29	127

\* The Justice party derived its financial support mainly from Telugu Zamindars in Andhra. These big landlords were ardent loyalists and hence were opposed to non-co-operation. Since they were anxious to have a greater say in provincial politics than what was allowed to them by the allocation of six of the 98 elected seats in the Legislative Council, they sponsored candidates for the other constituencies also. This was countenanced by Governors Willingdon and Goschen. Until his death in 1929, the Raja of Panagal was the Chief link between the Telugu Zamindars and the Justice Party.

\*\* Annepu Parasuramdas Patro, a wealthy Telugu lawyer from Ganjam.



COMPOSITION OF THE COUNCIL OF 1920 BY PARTY

Party:			
Non-Brahman or			
Justice Party	63	—	63
Congress	—	—	—
Independents	18	—	18
Anti-Ministerial	17	—	17
Officials	—	11	11
Non-Officials	—	18	18
<hr/>			
Total	98	29	127
<hr/>			

Thus the non-Brahmans were more than thrice the number of Brahmans. The Council crystallised into two well-defined groups—one supporting the non-Brahman Justice party which formed the Ministry and the other making up the opposition which was nearly homogenous in caste (Brahman) but not so in its political affiliation. The few Brahmans elected to the Council were largely men of ability and experience who had earned the respect of the public by their services on the old Council and in local affairs.<sup>3</sup> Comparing them with the ruling non-Brahmans, an English member of the Legislative Council observed: “It would be hard to find anywhere a parliamentary opposition freer from excess of party feeling or more purely public spirited; and man for man they showed a marked superiority to their opponents”.<sup>4</sup> These Brahmans, numerically very small, provided the only Opposition to the Ministry. Thanks to cleavage in the Congress, the Brahman members of the Opposition in the Council did not function in a concerted manner. The absence of a recognised leader among them also hampered their functioning. On important occasions, it must be conceded, they did act together. The Liberals played a very insignificant role in the elections to the Provincial Legislature. P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer and V.S. Srinivasa Sastri were elected respectively to the Legislative Assembly and the Council of State at the Centre. L.A. Govindaraghava Iyer was the only Liberal who contested and won in the election to the Legislative Council. The Christians, Mohammadans, Adi-Dravidas, Landlords and European groups were, as a rule, outside the ranks of the Ministerialists and the Opposition. Generally they voted with the Ministerial party though individual members of these groups voted with the Opposition on some occasions.<sup>5</sup>

Prominent public figures speculated upon two possibilities about the future of Madras politics: one was the ultimate development of the Ministerial party into a Conservative party of Southern India deriving its main support from the rural agricultural population; the other was the growth of the opposition into something corresponding to a Radical Party, deriving its support mainly from urban areas. This, they fondly hoped, would lead to the formation of *political* parties in the place of the prevalent *communal* ones. But it remained an idle speculation: Madras never became free from communal politics.

The three Ministers who formed the first Indian Ministry in the Presidency had no administrative experience. They depended for guidance and advice largely on the permanent bureaucrats. The latter had loyally adapted themselves to the new conditions and helped them in every possible way. P. Rajagopala Achariar,\* the President of the Legislative Council, for instance, evinced exceptional acumen in running the Council since the Reforms were ushered in. Everyone looked up to him for advice. Willingdon himself had the greatest admiration for this Indian who had shown remarkable independence of thought and speech. In 1923, when Achariar was taken into the India Council by Peel, the Secretary of State for India, Willingdon lamented: "It is his (Peel's) gain and my grievous loss".<sup>6</sup> In March 1921, Willingdon appointed three Council Secretaries to act as Ministerial whips. In the first Council, each Minister personally piloted a big bill through the Council under the Presidency of Achariar: the Hindu Religious Endowments Bill, the University Bill and the State Aid to Industries Bill.

Willingdon perceived the attitude of the Justice Ministry as one of servile co-operation with the Government. Now and then he humoured everyone around with expressions of cordiality. He boastfully claimed that the sharing of power among the *Reserved* and the *Transferred* halves which was the very essence of the system of diarchy existed only on paper where the Presidency of Madras was concerned. In other words, Willingdon claimed, his Government functioned very harmoniously with both the halves acting

\* He was the first President of the Legislative Council. Previously the Governor himself presided over the meetings of the Council. Prior to becoming the President of the Legislative Council, Rajagopala Achariar had, as a member of the Governor's Executive Council, shown remarkable ability in administering the departments under his control. As Dewan of the States of Cochin and Travancore, he had gained rich experience in political affairs.



as one. The Governor-in-Council or the *Reserved* half and the Ministry or the *Transferred* half did co-exist during Willingdon's time and the Justice Ministry was responsible for good many legislative measures. But the Governor's oft-repeated statement that there was an organised party at the back of the Ministry was only partially true. There was complete co-ordination between the Government and the Legislative Council only where the *Transferred* half was concerned. For instance, whenever communal issues came up, the non-Brahmans would vote as a *bloc*. When dealing with *Reserved* subjects however, not infrequently, the Ministerial party and the Opposition joined hands and defeated the Government in overwhelming strength.

The *Transferred half* would never accept responsibility for unpopular measures, despite strong pretensions by the Ministers or P.T. Chetty, the leader of the Party. Willingdon himself had made note of this tendency in 1922.<sup>7</sup> P. Rajagopala Achariar wrote to Willingdon much earlier: "They almost delight in circumventing the Executive Councillors. I fear the view is developing that *Reserved* subjects and Executive Councillors are in some way enemies of the people while the Ministers and the *Transferred* subjects are their friends".<sup>8</sup> This defeated the very purpose of diarchy which was intended to pave the way for full responsible government. One thing was palpably evident from the pattern of the votings. Willingdon's persistent efforts to work his government as one and indivisible by ensuring for the *Transferred* half the expert knowledge and guidance of his Executive Councillors and for the *Reserved* half the support of the Ministers in the Council, had been unfruitful. Nevertheless, Willingdon continued to felicitously describe his government—the two halves—as a "happy family" who worked together and consulted together.

Cleavage in the ruling Justice Party occurred within a year of the formation of the Ministry when four non-Brahman dissidents—C. Natesa Mudaliar, T.A. Ramalingam Chetty, C.R. Reddy\* and P. Subbaroyan\*\*—sat on the opposite benches. Thus even before the term of the first Council expired, an anti-Ministerial Justice Party was formed. The grievance of one of these dissentients was that the Ministry did not go far enough in the suppression of

\*A most promising Telugu non-Brahman; a distinguished product of the Cambridge University; first Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra University.

\*\*The Zamindar of Kumaramangalam (Salem).

Brahmans! This party too had no political programme. Its slogan was “Down with Sir P. T. Chetty; that is our programme”. In the second elections, the electorate returned Natesa Mudaliar at the head of the polls.<sup>9</sup>

*Second Elections (1923):*

Willingdon knew that the Congress was a powerful organisation. He was obsessed by the fear that the Congress non-co-operators might change their mind and contest the next elections and enter the Legislative Council. And he was justified in his apprehension. The results of the second elections held in October 1923 proved highly disgusting to the Governor. The crack that developed within the Justice legislature party of the first Council had grown into a schism in the second one. Some non-Brahmans contested against the Ministerialist non-Brahmans. The Swarajists\* and Independents of varied shades of political opinion won the elections. Though the Swarajists were a small sub-group in this council, their electoral success visibly disturbed Willingdon especially when they decided to occupy their seats in the Council. This went contrary to the pre-election promise of the All-India Swarajya Party not to occupy their seats where they were in a minority. The Madras Swarajists claimed that their party had good chances of being an effective opposition.<sup>10</sup> Satyamurti, a powerful member of the party, was elected from the Madras University Registered Graduates’ constituency for the first time. Referring to Satyamurti’s election, Willingdon wrote that he was the “leading Swarajist” who professed to be a disciple of C. R. Das “but will, I think, become in a short time quite a steady fellow. He is very able, a very good speaker and quite young”.<sup>11</sup>

Having no faith in the policy of obstruction, Satyamurti followed the line of A. Rangaswamy Iyengar, the leader of the Tamil Nad Swarajists. While giving evidence before the Civil Disobedience Committee\*\* in 1922 Iyengar said that, far from frittering away their energies, Congressmen would be building up a broad base for the National Movement by their involvement in such matters as education and land revenue in the Legislatures.

The Justice party put up a strenuous fight against the Swarajists

\**Infra* pp. 353–60.

\*\*The Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee was appointed by the AICC in June 1922.



during this election. Though many non-Brahmans were returned, the Justice party was hopelessly split. As for the Liberals, their party was wiped out in this election. The Swarajists were out to crush out of political existence the loyal Liberals who had immense faith in British generosity. The Swarajists did succeed in this. They called the Liberals “Responsivists” since they gave the Government responsive co-operation. Their participation in official and non-official functions which opposed the “wrecking tactics” of the Nationalists had already earned the Liberals much public obloquy. It gradually reduced the strength of their following in the Presidency.<sup>12</sup> Following the 1923 elections in which they were wiped out, the Government secured Liberal representation by nominating P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer to the Central Assembly. The composition of the second Legislative Council of 1923 by (1) race or caste and (2) party was as follows:

1) Race or Community	Elected	Nominated & Ex-officios	Total
Brahmans	13	1	14
Non-Brahmans	61	8	69
Depressed Classes	—	9	9
Mohammadans	13	1	14
Indian Christians	5	2	7
Europeans and Anglo-Indians	6	8	14
Total	98	29	127
2) Party:			
Non-Brahman or Justice Party	44	—	44
Congress (Swarajists)	11	—	11
Independents	6	1	7
Anti Ministerial	37	—	37
Officials	—	11	11
Non-Officials	—	17	17
Total	98	29	127

The polling in 1923 was heavier than in 1920. Owing to the Congress' boycott, the average votes polled for the entire Presidency was only 24.9 per cent in the first elections: it was as low as 13 per cent in North Arcot. In the second elections, the polling ranged from 28 per cent in the North Arcot Rural constituency to 58.8 per cent in the Madras city and 77 per cent in Tinnevely—Palayamcottah Urban Constituency.<sup>13</sup>

The Justice party which retained the majority was again invited to form the Ministry under the same Chief Minister. A.P. Patro was reappointed. K.V. Reddy Naidu was dropped and T.N. Sivagnanam Pillai\* was inducted in his place. Willingdon was so unsure of the life of the Council that he wrote: "The Ministry will be turned out very soon and I shall probably be making Ministries every month till I leave. The trouble is that there is an intense hunger for the three Ministerial posts and atleast 20 gentlemen think that they are the very men for it".<sup>14</sup> The ruling party's opposition in the Council consisted not only of Brahmans but also of non-Brahmans belonging to the Swarajya party.

#### *The No-Confidence Motion:*

The inauguration of the Second Council under the Reformed Constitution on 27 November 1923, was unique in two respects: it marked the advent of the Swarajya Party into it; and the very first resolution moved therein, was the No-Confidence motion sponsored by C.R. Reddy. On 18 November 1923, a confidential letter was sent by C. R. Reddy to all the dissentient non-Brahman members to the effect that a vote of no-confidence would be moved by him on behalf of the Democratic and Progressive non-Brahmans as the first business on 27 November. The letter stated that all those non-Brahmans who were keen on restoring popular ideals and methods "are pledged to bring about the downfall of this Ministry. If we stand firm by our democratic faith, our success is certain. The (election) results in Ganjam, Krishna, Vizag, Bellary and Coimbatore and the majority of the districts have shown clearly that the country is against Reaction and for a Progressive policy. The elections all over India show that we are in for a period

\* From Tinnevely; strove hard along with another politician of the same place S.T. Shanmukham Pillai, to spread anti-Brahman and anti-Congress feeling in Tinnevely.



of vigorous democracy. It is for you to decide if the Madras Presidency should be an exception. . . .”<sup>15</sup>

On 19 November 1923, a printed appeal urging the need to form a non-Brahman opposition to the Justice Ministry signed by C. Natesa Mudaliar, T.A. Ramalingam Chetty and C. Ramalinga Reddy was circulated.<sup>16</sup> The Public came in large numbers to the Council both out of interest in the no-confidence motion and to hear the maiden speech to be delivered by that giant among orators, Satyamurti. It is stated that a huge crowd had gathered in the Council Hall “until then unprecedented in the annals of Madras Council”. The visitors’ galleries were packed even before the usual time. College students gaining no access to the hall were found overflowing the passages and corridors.<sup>17</sup>

The mover of the motion said with all elegance that while it was accepted that the Governor had every right to empanel the Ministry, the Councillors returned by the electorate had also a right to test whether such a Ministry enjoyed their confidence or not. His motion was therefore not a vote of censure as some would erroneously believe, but one of no-confidence in the Ministry headed by the Raja of Panagal for two reasons: (1) the Justice Party had no claim to victory when the anti-Ministerialists had defeated them in the elections; and (2) the hollow record of the Chief Minister.<sup>18</sup> Many spoke in favour of the motion indicting the Justice Ministry. The Treasury Bench put up a feeble defence against the volley of charges levelled against it.

When Satyamurti spoke in the afternoon, there was a fresh wave of enthusiasm among the visitors. Spelling out a long catalogue of acts of commission and omission on the part of the Ministry, he said it went to the electorate “bankrupt of policy, bankrupt of programme and bankrupt of candidates. . . .” He allayed the apprehension of a member who prophesied a dismal future for the Presidency in the event of the defeat of the Ministry by asserting that the three Ministers were not the last word in Ministerial excellence. There might be bankruptcy in the policy of the Ministers but certainly there was no bankruptcy of talents in the Presidency. He accused the Governor of having trampled under his feet an important recommendation of the Joint Committee of Parliament, namely, the collective responsibility of the Ministry: he had dismissed one of the old members (K. V. Reddy Naidu) and brought in another (T.N. Sivagnanam Pillai). This arbitrary action of the Governor, Satyamurti pointed out, violated the principle of collective respon-

sibility. None on the Treasury Bench appeared cheerful, and “a deathlike gloom” prevailed over them when Satyamurti wound up his peroration: “I already see the hand of death upon this Ministry. It is not permanent. It is bound to die. When this Ministry dies, it will die unwept, unhonoured and unsung”.<sup>19</sup>

But the motion was lost when it was put to vote, notwithstanding the vigorous way in which it was moved and supported by two titans in the art of eloquence and public speaking. It was defeated by a majority of 65 votes to 42, 10 remaining neutral. The pattern of voting on the motion was significant: out of the 65 who opposed it, 44 were elected members; but all those who voted for it were elected members. In other words, the Ministry survived on the votes of a very thin majority of two elected members. It exposed that the docile Ministry was propped up by a bureaucratic executive. The motion had attracted unprecedented public interest and attention. The attendance of the public, which was the largest ever seen, indicated that “Democracy in Madras is at last beginning to take an interest in the doings of its representatives. . .”.<sup>20</sup>

Thus the second Justice Ministry had to face on the very day of its installation a no-confidence motion moved by a non-Brahman member. Of course, it emerged from the rough and tumble, less battered than the Governor himself had expected. Willingdon’s Government proved a friend-in-need to the tottering Ministry: it lent the votes of nominated members, official and non-official, to the Ministry.

In March 1924, the Swarajya members entered into an alliance with the other Opposition members in the Council to form the “United Nationalist Party” under the leadership of C.V.S. Narasimha Raju\*. These opposition members represented the Progressive non-Brahmans and Independent Nationalists. This opposition with some claims to political coherence continued to play that useful role upto the end of this council’s term in 1926. Satyamurti was the lone Brahman Swarajist on the Executive Committee of this party which included the non-Brahman dissidents—C.R. Reddy, C. Natesa Mudaliar and P. Subbaroyan. The Swarajists formed a separate group within the opposition, chose their own leader and whip, took up a separate block in the Council Chamber and began their life as a separate unit, though in most matters they continued in association, if not in alliance, with the remaining opposition groups.

\* A Telugu Zamindar; was a Liberal in the First Council (1920–23).



It was during the second term of the reformed constitution (1923–26), that the Government of India instituted the Reforms Enquiry Committee. It was appointed in 1924, in response to insistent demands from many quarters to revise the Act of 1919 as the system of diarchy had become unworkable. Even the ruling Justice party whose loyalty to the *Raj* could never be questioned, felt that the reformed constitution was failing. The immediate cause for the appointment of the committee was the resolution of the Swarajya party in the Central Assembly recommending the establishment of full Responsible Government. The nine-member Committee headed by the Home Member Alexander Muddiman was to examine the working of the Montford Reforms.

Owing to sharp cleavage of opinion on the question of continuance of diarchy, the committee submitted two reports. The majority report signed by the three English members with Mohammad Shafi and the Maharaja of Burdwan was a most disappointing document. It had nothing worth mentioning except the transference of Forests to the Provinces. Many asked why at all the Committee was appointed at a huge cost of Rs. 46,000?<sup>21</sup> The only “relieving feature” of the whole wasteful experiment was that it gave an opportunity to the four Indian members—P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer, T.B. Sapru, Jinnah and R. Paranjpye—to state boldly their view. Their minority report said that diarchy was “absolutely unworkable, as established by evidence and therefore the constitution should be changed, providing for automatic progress in the future.”<sup>22</sup>

### *Third Elections (1926):*

In the Third elections held in November 1926, the Congress (Swarajists) defeated the Justice party by a vast majority. It bore testimony to the innate strength of the Congress organisation and the power of its propaganda on the one hand and to the weakening of the sway of the Justice party on the other. The composition of the third Council of 1926 by (1) race or caste and (2) party is given on page 340.

Among the prominent men who returned unopposed to this Council were the Raja of Ramnad and Satyamurti.<sup>23</sup> The Government as usual was reluctant to concede victory to the Swarajists. It maintained that the result of the election reflected an anti-Ministerial attitude rather than a pro-Swaraj leaning.<sup>24</sup> The election itself was fought on the sole issue whether nationalism or communalism

1) Race or Community	Elected	Nominated & Ex-officio	Total
Brahmans	18	3	21
Non-Brahmans	Hindus	10	66
Depressed Classes		10	10
Mohammadans		1	14
Indian Christians	5	2	7
Europeans and Anglo-Indians	6	8	14
Total	98	34	132
2) Party:			
Non-Brahman or Justice Party	21	1	22
Congress	41	—	41
Independents	36	22	58
Anti-Ministerial	—	—	—
Officials	—	11	11
Total	98	34	132

should win. The electorate had given a clear and distinct verdict. Ironically, the two oldest and staunchest nationalist districts of the Presidency—Salem and Tinnevely—did not return Congressmen.<sup>25</sup>

The results of the elections unmistakably indicated that the people were fed up with six years of communal administration which “lacked in statesmanship”. Its sole motto of *Viprakshaya*—down with Brahmans<sup>26</sup> was the major factor that contributed to its downfall. But that was not the only factor. Even in the economic sphere, its achievements were meagre. In the fields of agriculture, industry and trade which were the main avocations of the people, there was practically no advancement during the six years of the Justice party rule. However, to be fair to the party, it must be conceded that the constraints of the system of diarchy obstructed its effective functioning. Nevertheless, the Justice party did not tackle



the problems of labour promptly and efficiently. No attempt was made to ameliorate the conditions of the Indians abroad. The success of the Congress in the elections was in no small measure due to the genuine and patriotic services of its members in this direction.

The Presidency returned a large majority of Congressmen to the Legislative Council. During these elections, the Tamil Nad Congress and the Swarajya Party worked unitedly. There was a tough contest between C. N. Muthuranga Mudaliar of the Congress and A. Ramaswami Mudaliar of the Justice party in which the former won. V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar actually camped at Chingleput to work for Congress victory. M. P. Sivagnanam\* was one of the leaders who worked strenuously for the success of the Congress now. E. V. Ramaswami Naicker who had not formally left the Congress worked against Congress candidates.<sup>27</sup> Rajaji did not directly involve himself in this election, busy as he was in his *ashram* at Tiruchengodu with such constructive activities as removal of untouchability, temple-entry for Harijans, *Khadar* promotion etc. But at the request of Motilal Nehru and S. Srinivasa Iyengar, he wrote to the voters of Tamil Nad to favour Congress candidates. And this yielded fruit.

The Congress being the largest single party, its leader C. V. S. Narasimha Raju\*\* was invited by the Governor on 22 November 1926 to form the Ministry in the dual Government.<sup>28</sup> But he declined the offer in obedience to the mandate given by the Congress at Cawnpore not to accept the office of Minister till the Government responded satisfactorily to the national demand to abolish diarchy.

“We must pool all our resources and make a firm stand against a non-co-operating bureaucracy and wrest *Swaraj* from their unwilling hands. I trust the lapse of six years has not made us either forget the wholly illusory character of the Reforms or develop a new tenderness towards them. Our experience has, if anything, abundantly shown that the Reforms have not given the people’s representatives any real power and can lead neither to self-government nor to good government”,

\*Nationalist leader; well-known Tamil writer.

\*\*Raju and 15 other Congress MLCs seemed to favour the idea of forming a Ministry but required time until the Congress met at Gauhati in December 1926. But Goschen could not afford to wait.

declared the Congress President S. Srinivasa Iyengar, at the forty first session of the Congress at Gauhati in December 1926.<sup>29</sup> But the electorate was certainly “annoyed” at the Congress’ refusal of office.<sup>30</sup>

Since the verdict of the electorate had gone against the Justice Ministry headed by Panagal (though the latter was returned), Governor Goschen was left with the only alternative of inviting the Independents to form a Ministry. P. Subbaroyan was appointed Chief Minister while A. Ranganatha Mudaliar\* and R.N. Arogyaswami Mudaliar\*\* became the second and the third Ministers respectively. These two men were later replaced by S. Muthiah Mudaliar\*\*\* and M.R. Sethuratnam Iyer† on the eve of the visit of the Statutory Commission headed by John Simon to Madras. The Congress maintained an “attitude of neutrality towards the new Ministry”.<sup>31</sup> C. V. S. Narasimha Raju, who declined to form the Ministry, accepted, with the approval of his party, the important post of the President of the new Legislature. Sami Venkatachalam Chetty†† replaced Narasimha Raju as leader of the Swarajya Party in the legislature. Chetty’s election caused considerable disappointment to Satyamurti.<sup>32</sup>

A proud feature of this Council was the election and entry of a woman to the Council for the first time in Madras. Muthulakshmi Reddy was the first lady to sit in the Madras Legislative Council. It was in the Madras Presidency that the movement for admission of women in elected bodies was initiated.<sup>33</sup> Muthulakshmi Reddy’s entry into the Legislature was a great moment in Indian history.

The Subbaroyan Ministry was in the doldrums from the day of its birth. But it miraculously survived all calamities. The very first threat to it emanated from the Gauhati Congress of December 1926. This session resolved *inter alia* to refuse to accept Minister-ships or other offices as the gift of Government; to oppose the formation of a Ministry by other parties; and to refuse supplies and throw out budgets thereby defeating elected Ministries. It allowed its members to move resolutions. They could also introduce and support measures and bills relating to: healthy growth of

\* From Bellary; a theosophist and long-standing follower of Annie Besant.

\*\* Indian Christian; Lawyer by profession.

\*\*\* From Tanjore; won the election in 1926 on Congress ticket.

† From Trichinopoly; won the election in 1926 on Congress ticket.

†† Non-Brahman Telugu businessman of Madras.



national life; advancement of the economic, agricultural, industrial and commercial interest of the country; and protection of the freedom of person, speech and association and freedom of the Press. Although the first part of the resolution caused considerable tension to the Government, its fear was soon dispelled. It was contended by the upholders of diarchy that the only way to eject the Ministry from office was by a refusal to vote their salaries; since the Justicites would not join the Swarajists in such a course of action, it was unlikely that the latter would attempt to break the Ministry.

On 16 March 1927, B. Muniswami Naidu\* of the Justice party moved a motion to reduce the grant for the pay of officers by Rs. 100 for the purpose of expressing a want of confidence in the Ministers. Though the Congress party in the Legislative Council refused to accept the Independent Ministry headed by Subbaroyan, it did not want to adopt just then an uncompromising opposition to the Ministry which had been formed. So Satyamurti opposed the cut motion. This caused a great stir outside the Council particularly among members of his own party. If the Swarajists did not back the Independent Ministry, they would be indirectly helping the Justice Party's return to power. There were actually two distinct currents of thought within the Madras Congress—one inclined to support the new Ministry which alone would keep the Justicites away, and the other bent upon wrecking the existing system regardless of its consequences. The latter group was annoyed that the former was supporting the Government and voting supplies which they had previously opposed. In this particular instance, the Swarajists did a wise thing in opposing the motion although it ran counter to their own declaration at Gauhati. In the course of an eloquent speech Satyamurti asked the Europeans and the Executive Councillors what they thought of this motion of their erstwhile colleagues, the ex-Ministers—who were, throughout their tenure of office, fighting against prohibition. They were playing the dirty game of overthrowing the Ministry simply because its personnel did not suit them. The cut motion was lost—53 votes against 12.<sup>34</sup>

But the Madras Swarajists were attacked from all sides for having departed from the decision taken at Gauhati. Congressmen twitted them for having broken the election pledges and set at

\* From Chittoor; his family had administered the estate of the Raja of Karvetnagar for centuries.

naught the Gauhati resolution. Some even toyed with the idea of moving a resolution at the AICC to bring about the resignation of the Swarajist members of the Madras Legislative Council.<sup>35</sup> Horniman\* who was in Madras then, considered it to be a betrayal of the Congress by the Swarajist members of the Madras Legislative Council.<sup>36</sup> However, the Congress Working Committee before whom the Madras Swarajists were called upon to explain their conduct, explicitly exonerated them from all blame in this regard. But the "blind advocates of discipline who valued dead rules much more than living success" raised an artificial hue and cry against the decision of the Working Committee.<sup>37</sup> Prominent among those who asserted that the Working Committee had no jurisdiction and that its decision in the matter was *ultra vires* were T. Prakasam, Bulusu Sambamurti, P. Varadarajulu Naidu and R.K. Shanmukham Chetty. The last two persons attacked the Congress President S. Srinivasa Iyengar and called upon the non-Brahmans to join the Congress in large numbers in order to purge it of its bad elements. The Government rejoiced over the apparent split. Goschen cried gleefully: "This rift, will, I think widen".<sup>38</sup>

In the meantime, the Justice party convened a meeting of the Non-Brahman Federation at Coimbatore and adopted the following three resolutions: (1) individual members of the Justice party might join the Congress; (2) the party should not accept office until Provincial autonomy was granted; and (3) a vote of no-confidence should be moved in the new Ministry, in the Law Member and in the Governor for allowing the present Ministry to continue in power and permitting certain appointments. The original resolution framed at the instance of Ramaswami Naicker was in the form of a request to Birkenhead, Secretary of State, that Governor Goschen might be recalled. Naicker was angry with the Governor for having appointed C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, a Brahman, as law member. Later, however, the resolution was amended.<sup>39</sup>

It was remarkable that after six years of working the diarchy, the Justice party condemned it. Such outbursts were the outcome of their defeat in the elections in 1926. Since November 1926 they had done nothing but "whine against circumstances and kick against the pricks, the worst prick being the deprivation of the power of patronage. In their complaint against the disposal of offices they have conveniently forgotten their own reputation and

\* B.G. Horniman, Editor of *The Bombay Chronicle*.



that their own defeat (sic) was largely due to their partiality in awarding appointments".<sup>40</sup> The charge against C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer was without foundation. In the judicial appointments made by him there were as many non-Brahmans, Mohammadans and Christians as Brahmans. Goschen reprehended the conduct of the members of the Justice party who "have lost all sense of perspective and, like children suddenly deprived of pleasure, have fallen into a tantrum. It is a curious want of political sagacity displayed by what used to be called 'the party of constitutionalists' on the eve of the arrival of the Royal Commission".<sup>41</sup> The *bona-fides* of the second resolution of the Justice party on the question of office-acceptance was doubted by some of the members of the Congress. They saw in it an attempt on the part of the Justicites to dislodge the existing Ministry, with the help of the Congress Party and then get into office themselves.

On 23 August 1927, the leader of the Opposition in the Council moved that the Ministers did not possess the confidence of the House. The Congress and the Justice party made common cause and voted for the motion which recognised two factors: (1) the unworkability of the system of diarchy; and (2) the need to prevent any Ministry from functioning until provincial autonomy was conceded at least in Madras. The Raja of Panagal said that the relations between the two halves of the Government were far from being harmonious and that the Cabinet was no more a "happy home. . .". During his speech, Satyamurti jeered at the Finance Member Moir who was perturbed and perplexed at the union of the Justice party, which the British had built up for several long years, with the Swarajists. Answering the charge of Moir that the Swarajists were out to create a spirit of resentment against all Governments in India, Satyamurti said that it was incumbent upon any subject nation fighting "resourceful and unscrupulous bureaucracy" to generate in its people a spirit of resentment against foreign rule and "transmute it into energy of action against foreign rule". He then reminded the Chief Minister that the latter could continue in office only as long as the neutrality of the Swarajists was guaranteed. Since that neutrality was gone, Satyamurti suggested his coming over with his colleagues to the ranks of those who continued their fight for *Swaraj* against heavy odds. The motion was, however, defeated by a narrow majority of 67 votes against 56.<sup>42</sup>

In spite of the unanimity of opinion among the members of the

Congress party of the time, the cleavage in the Congress group in the Presidency continued. In October 1927, S. Muthiah Mudaliar and 5 other members of the Congress party obtained the permission of the President of the legislature to be allowed to sit in the Opposition as a separate group from the Congress members.<sup>43</sup>

The announcement of the appointment of the Indian Statutory Commission paved the way for a temporary sinking of sectional interests in the face of a common opposition. Following the resignation of Arogyaswami Mudaliar and Ranganatha Mudaliar on the issue of the boycott of the Simon Commission and the appointment of 2 new Ministers, 9 members of the old Ministerialist Party (inclusive of the 2 ex-Ministers) ceased to be members of that party and asked for and obtained seats on the Opposition Benches; 2 members of the Opposition went to the Ministerialist side and one became an Independent.<sup>44</sup> The fact that the two Ministers who resigned had an interview with Satyamurti alarmed the Justice Party so much that they even conjectured the possibility of the formation of a coalition Ministry of Satyamurti and the two former Ministers.

In December 1928, the Raja of Panagal, the pillar of the Justice party passed away. It was an irreparable loss to the party as he was keeping the feuding members of his party together by the force of his personality. This apart, Panagal also underwrote the financial requirements of the party organ *Justice*.<sup>45</sup> The natural successor of Panagal was A.P. Patro but the party did not want him as he was dictatorial in his attitude towards its members. The two other potential successors were Ramaswami Mudaliar and B. Muniswami Naidu. The former who was Editor of the *Justice*, was not very popular with the party besides being too young for the position. The latter who was supposed to hold more advanced views than others was also not suitable. Subbaroyan who also coveted the leadership of the Justice party fondly hoped to move to that group with his Third Minister who was a Brahman.<sup>46</sup>

Goschen was perturbed over this fluid state of affairs in the Justice party. Any split in it would have been extremely awkward for the Government for the Ministry at that moment counted upon the support of the Justice Party for its very existence. Ten months had elapsed before a leader was chosen for the justice party. It was only in October 1929 that B. Muniswami Naidu emerged as the "compromise leader" at the Non-Brahman Confederation held at Nellore.



On 18 March 1929, Satyamurti moved another no-confidence motion against the Subbaroyan Ministry under the cut motion on the Demand for General Administration. The Chief Minister came under severe attack for having gone back on the promise made by his Ministry on the floor of the House in respect of boycotting the Simon Commission. By this act Subbaroyan had crushed the principle of collective ministerial responsibility to the House. Having no principle or programme of its own, Subbaroyan's Ministry had allowed itself to be completely submerged by those of the *Reserved* half, said Satyamurti. The fate of the motion was, of course, a foregone conclusion. The Ministry was at this time in a stronger position than before, with the official block and the Justice Party ranged in its support. The Justicites who professed to be champions of democracy, had no scruples in defending the invasion of the elementary rights of the citizens by the bureaucracy. The resolution was therefore defeated.<sup>47</sup> But the deliberations that preceded it were of educative value. They proved conclusively that the Ministry was "a slave of the combined forces of bureaucrats and an opportunist political group and is therefore incapable of doing anything good but obliged to placate its masters and make itself responsible for acts of commission and omission of which its own good sense or conscience may intensely disapprove".<sup>48</sup>

#### *Fourth Elections (1930):*

The election to the Fourth Legislative Council took place only in September 1930. Shortly before this election, the Justice Party brought a major change in its creed to enable the admission of Brahmans into its fold. At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the SILF held on 15 June 1930 which was presided over by its Chairman P.T. Rajan, A.P. Patro moved a resolution recommending the creed of the Federation in future to be: (1) attainment of *Swaraj* for India as a component part of the British Empire by all peaceful, legitimate and constitutional means; (2) attainment of social equality by the abolition of distinctions based on birth; (3) ensuring adequate representation of all communities in the public services, in the legislatures and in other public bodies; and (4) throwing open the membership of the SILF to anyone above the age of 21 who subscribed to its creed.<sup>49</sup>

However the fact that the Justice party had all along been a communal party was uppermost in the mind of the public. And this was

the only party in the field during this election. The other candidates were mostly Independents. The results of such an election naturally gave one the impression that the parties in the Presidency had not still advanced politically. The Congress, the only organised political party, boycotted the elections although the Congressmen of the Presidency were much against it. Even at its meeting held at Madura on 9 May 1929, the Tamil Nad Congress Committee under the Presidency of S. Srinivasa Iyengar resolved on office acceptance by Congressmen. It was considered essential to checkmate effectively the bureaucratic attempts to strengthen its hold by exploiting communal prejudice and setting up "puppet and subversive Ministries" in the Presidency. The resolution became the most controversial topic throughout the Congress circles. Lengthy discussions followed regarding the grant of complete freedom of action to Congress legislators in which S. Srinivasa Iyengar, Satyamurti and others actively participated. Srinivasa Iyengar made no secret of the dangers involved in adhering to the principle of boycott of Councils in a Presidency like Madras where it had failed absolutely. The elections held in 1926 had proved it: a party wholly defeated acquired greater power as an "anti-national and reactionary Ministry".<sup>50</sup>

However in obedience to the resolution of the Lahore Congress of December 1929, the Congressmen in the Presidency boycotted the fourth elections.

The Congress declared in this (Lahore) session that the word *Swaraj* in Article I of the party's constitution "shall mean complete independence" and called upon all Congressmen to devote their exclusive attention to the attainment of *purna Swaraj* for India. As a preliminary step towards attaining this goal, the Congress resolved upon a complete boycott of the Central and Provincial Legislatures and all other committees constituted by the Government. The Congress also called upon its members as well as others taking part in the National Movement to abstain from participating in future elections and directed its existing members in the Legislatures and Committees to resign their seats. Naturally, the Justice Party swept the polls in this election. But it must be said to its credit that the party had utilised the four years it had been out of power to reorganise itself. The party had for the first time formulated a programme seeking to give "a predominantly political basis" to its Council work and to eliminate "those features of communal exclusion and estrangement which embittered the first years of diarchy in the Presidency".<sup>51</sup>



The Independent candidates who contested the elections owed allegiance to neither the Congress nor the Justice Party but were ready to join any party in power after the elections. This was a very unhealthy phenomenon. To combat such opportunism, Governor Stanley justly recommended the conferment upon the elected representatives of the people all control over the affairs of the province. But it was not given effect to.<sup>52</sup>

The outstanding feature of this election in Madras was the defeat of two of the three members of the ruling Ministry. Subbaroyan was re-elected by a very narrow majority. He joined the Opposition with a view to resurrecting the United National Party. The reverses suffered by the previous Ministry constituted a significant lesson to the Legislators and Ministers of the future.<sup>53</sup>

On 24 October 1930 Muniswamy Naidu, leader of the Justice Party in the Madras Legislative Council, was called upon by Governor Stanley to form a new Ministry. His colleagues were S. Kumaraswamy Reddy and P.T. Rajan.\* The opposition was constituted largely by non-Brahmans. Its leadership included Sami Venkatachalam Chetty, R.N. Arogyaswami Mudaliar, T.A. Ramalingam Chetty and P. Subbaroyan. They were seasoned politicians well-set to “harass” the Justice Ministry and “abet” the Congress from within the council to scrap diarchy.

A split occurred in the Ministry within two years of its constitution. A man like Muniswami Naidu who stood for justice and fair play could not be expected to continue for long. He favoured the inclusion of Brahmans in the Justice Party, upheld the rights of tenants in the Zamindaris and was anxious to prevent the misuse and abuse of ministerial powers. The Telugu Zamindars who had all along played a key role in the leadership contest felt betrayed when Muniswami Naidu denied them a berth in his Ministry. His sympathetic attitude to the tenants further aggravated their feeling. The younger Raja of Chettinad was also disillusioned at his being denied a place in the new Ministry. Though his father had not completely identified himself with the Justice Party, next to the Zamindars, he provided funds to sustain the party. Both the disgruntled groups—the Telugu Zamindars and the Nattukkottai Chetties—united soon after the formation of Ministry to persecute the Chief Minister who had wronged them.

In October 1932, both the second and the third Ministers resigned together on the eve of the Non-Brahman Confederation at

\* From Madura; stalwart of the Justice Party.

Tanjore, which was convened to discuss a vote of censure on the Chief Minister. But the Chief Minister had tendered his resignation even before the meeting took place on 8 October. But consequent upon the understanding reached between the first and the second Ministers, the motion of censure on the former was withdrawn. Thereafter the idea gained ground that Muniswamy Naidu had consented to get out of the fray and that he would remain in the party and continue to support it from outside the cabinet. On 4 November, the Governor called upon the Raja of Bobbili\*—the accepted leader of the Justice Party—to form the Ministry presumably in the belief that they were a united party commanding a majority in the House. But some of the statements of Muniswamy Naidu and the categorical denials of the Raja of Bobbili made on the floor of the House on 7 November 1932, brought to the fore the definite cracks in the Justice party. The sequel was the secession of 19 members from the party. In all the charges and countercharges that were traded within the party, it was the “questions of cliques and personalities that loomed large”, and not the differences on political or administrative matters or on the prevailing economic depression. The public naturally despaired of the future course of provincial autonomy in Madras, if such “wholly personal or sectional, communal or sub-communal issues were allowed to dominate the Council politics of this province any longer”.<sup>54</sup> About this time the Justice Party allowed its members to join the Congress to “exploit the Non-Brahman feelings within the Congress”. It also threw open its membership to Brahmans “but with no avail”.<sup>55</sup>

#### *Fifth Elections (1934):*

The election to the Fifth Legislative Council was held in October 1934. Since the ban on Council-entry had been lifted, the Congress contested it. It won every seat it contested, defeating the Justice Party wholesale. “What has happened to the Justice Party? They seem to have been completely snowed under and Madras has gone completely Congress everywhere. It is a bad job . . . it makes it difficult for you at the very start” wrote an alarmed Viceroy to the Governor of Madras.<sup>56</sup> The superb performance of the Congress in Madras over the Justice Party, set the pace for Congress victories elsewhere. Perturbed over the results, the Madras Government

\* The thirteenth Raja of Bobbili.



tried to console itself with this argument: that the narrow franchise for the legislatures merely represented the *intelligentsia* but the wider franchise for Municipal elections denoted a more representative public opinion and in this the Justice Party was still dominant.<sup>57</sup> All the same, the Government of Madras could not help admitting that the sweeping success of the Congress was due to its superior organisation. Congress agents were in evidence at almost all polling stations while the Justice party candidates, being disunited, were often unrepresented and failed to make organised arrangements to bring the voters to the poll.<sup>58</sup> Besides, the Justice party as the party in power, had earned considerable amount of unpopularity on account of its support to the Government in its repressive measures during the Civil Disobedience Movement. Since the victorious Congress party did not accept office, the leader of the vanquished Justice Party—the Raja of Bobbili—continued as Chief Minister along with his two colleagues.

On 11 December 1934, the Justice Party brought a motion of “no-confidence” against M.A. Muthiah Chetty, its Chief Whip, on the ground that he had played the party false in the elections.\* It was also said on this occasion that his work in the Council was most unsatisfactory. Muthiah Chetty denied all the allegations against him. He resigned from the post of the Chief Whip in December 1934.<sup>59</sup> The death of Muniswami Naidu in January 1935—a month later—complicated the efforts of the Justice party to reunite its conflicting members. In March 1935, Muthiah Chetty seceded from the party itself along with his followers and formed a separate group. Exploiting the unsettled state caused by these desertions in the party, P. Subbaroyan, leader of the Opposition, tabled a vote of “No-confidence” against the Bobbili Ministry on 14 March 1935. The debate that followed it degenerated into a ventilation of personal grievances. The motion was lost, a substan-

\* The defeat of R. K. Shanmukham Chetty by Sami Venkatachalam Chetty in the election to the Central Legislative Assembly held in 1934 was imputed to Muthiah Chetty. It was rumoured that he betrayed the trust Shanmukham Chetty had reposed in him by handing over some of the votes in his possession to favour the Congress candidate Sami Venkatachalam Chetty. But there was no tangible proof for the allegation. When Chief Minister Bobbili hesitated to give consent to move the no-confidence motion, he was accused of “shielding a moneyed man”.

Incredible it may sound but nevertheless true, the same Shanmukham Chetty, after being India’s First Finance Minister in 1947, went so far as to accept from the Nattukkottai Chetty the Vice-Chancellorship of the Annamalai University just before his death in 1953 (Nilkan Perumal, *Bobbili*, p. 95).

tial number of elected members voting against it.<sup>60</sup>

Having been in existence for five long years, the Justice Ministry had become supinely indolent. Bobbili was always disinclined to take the lead. His Ministry became unpopular. The reformed constitution had become moribund,<sup>61</sup> as the Justice Party under his leadership was “all at sixes and sevens”.<sup>62</sup> Even so, the Government was determined not to allow the Justicites, who had always been its loyal friends, to disintegrate. So in August 1935, Erskine extended the life of the Legislative Council by twelve months. The Governor originally planned to have a coalition Ministry consisting of all the Moderates under Bobbili’s leadership. It would administer the Presidency during the interregnum between the passage into law of the new Government of India Act and the actual introduction of Provincial Autonomy. His idea was to bring in Subbaroyan from the United Nationalists which would attract the Moderate constitutionalists back to the Justice Party.<sup>63</sup> But he could not do so as the Justice Party had a majority in the existing Council. And Bobbili, who first welcomed the idea of coalition, became “frightened” as time went, feeling that the adoption of such a course would split his party and affect his own personal position as its leader. So Erskine had to drop the idea of a coalition Ministry.

In October 1936, Kumaraswami Reddy resigned from the Ministry owing to ill-health. Commenting on the cause of his resignation, the *Justice* observed that it was “an explanation popular in high places this year”. Though Reddy was over 60, his sudden parting was resented by Governor Erskine who wanted him to continue. But the ailing Minister refused to reconsider his decision. Muthiah Chetty who withdrew from the party a year and a half earlier and was now manoeuvring to get back to the party, was appointed Minister in the place of Reddy. Men like Mohammad Usman felt that moneyed people like the Chettinad leaders had to be conciliated.<sup>64</sup> Muthiah Chetty’s re-entry healed the split in the party. It also brought his father’s financial support to the Justicites. Governor Erskine was not altogether happy about this appointment.<sup>65</sup> It might be because he wanted Bobbili to bring into the Ministry a Muslim as that would remove any legitimate grievances of the Muslims in Madras in regard to appointments.<sup>66</sup> Muthiah Chetty achieved nothing as Minister. He held office hardly a few months. He received his knighthood and thereafter, he had nothing to do with the Justice party.



In 1936 Bobbili went to England for health reasons. In the absence of a provision in the Government of India Act of 1919 for giving leave to a Minister to go out of India, he had to resign his post as Chief Minister. His administrative work was distributed between his two colleagues.<sup>67</sup>

The system of diarchy ceased to exist when Provincial Autonomy came into force in 1937.

### *The Swarajya Party:*

At this stage, a brief sketch of the origin of the Swarajya Party in the 1920s and its subsequent revival in 1934 is necessary. Following the withdrawal of the Non-co-operation Movement and the incarceration of Gandhiji on 10 March 1922, the Congress leaders were at a deadlock over the question of council-entry. It was felt by the protagonists of council-entry that the country had not benefited at all by the performance of the non-Congress members in the Indian and Provincial legislatures. Their accomplishments were nil. They had permitted the Central Assembly to pass cruel repressive laws to suppress the Non-co-operation Movement; to increase taxes to pay higher salaries to British officials; to levy new taxes; and to double the duty on salt.

If the condition was bad during this period (1920--22) in respect of India as a whole, it was worse where the Presidency of Madras was concerned. The necessity for capturing the Councils was felt to be more urgent in this Province than elsewhere primarily to arrest the evil consequences of the communal policies of the Justice Ministry. The system of diarchy afforded a most fertile field for the seeds of caste hatred to sprout and grow. The Ministerial party was also responsible for according support to the repressive policies of the Government "openly in many cases and tacitly in others".<sup>68</sup>

Satyamurti fought relentlessly to persuade the Congress to agree to the capture of councils and practise non-co-operation from within them. He had never been happy about the boycott of councils even during the heyday of the Non-co-operation Movement. He felt strongly that the most sensible course would be to enter the councils and continue therein the fight against the Government. His faith in the efficacy of struggle from within the legislature was inspired both by his understanding of the contemporary political situation and by his oratorical and forensic capabilities.<sup>69</sup> He had already gained prominence as a great orator in the Provincial Congress which had

won him a place as the Secretary to the Congress delegation that went before the Joint Select Committee in London in 1919.

At the Tiruppur Provincial Conference of 4 November 1922, Satyamurti made a powerful plea for lifting the ban on council entry. He said, entering the councils was not inconsistent with the principle of non-co-operation; on the other hand, it could be better pursued and the country's real interests better advanced by getting into the legislative bodies and capturing power.<sup>70</sup> In any case, unlike the other items of boycott, council entry became a serious issue and caused wide breach within the Congress. The Report of the Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee\* itself showed that it was sharply divided on the question of council entry—163 favouring and 302 opposing it. But Satyamurti was clearly in a minority at Tiruppur. However, he hoped to muster support at the Gaya Congress and, with this end in view, he had already been corresponding with such leaders as C.R. Das, M.R. Jayakar, N.C. Kelkar, T.B. Saprú, M.M. Malaviya, Sarojini Naidu and Vittalbhai Patel. He even suggested the formation of a party within the Congress which would adopt council entry as its mode of action. He observed in his correspondence that boycotting the elections of 1923 would mean “political suicide for another four years”. And he also declared publicly: “Drop the fatuous and suicidal boycott of Legislative Councils in the country, and concentrate on capturing them and using them as a potent means for compelling the early advent of *Swaraj*”.<sup>71</sup>

The thirty seventh session of the Indian National Congress met at Gaya in December 1922. In his remarkable Presidential address, C.R. Das first advanced his proposal to depart from Gandhiji over the issue of council entry and boldly made a bid for a plan of obstruction. With the exception of this, he stood for non-co-operation. But the “no-changers”, as the opponents of council entry were known, would allow no concessions. This Congress ratified by a resolution, the continuation of council boycott by 1740 votes against 890. Rajaji who stood for full-fledged non-co-operation played a prominent role in this move. This resolution paved the way for the formation of the Swarajya Party. It was not intended to be a rival to the Indian National Congress. In fact, the Swarajists acted in the confidence that in course of time they would succeed in converting the “No-changers” to their own view in respect of council entry. Even the

\* Appointed by the Congress under the Chairmanship of Hakim Ajmal Khan.



membership of the Swarajya Party was not open to persons who were not members of the Congress. The AICC meeting on 26 May 1923 at Bombay, moved a resolution appealing to Congressmen not to pursue the “No Vote” propaganda among the voters, thus leaving the field open for the Swarajists to contest the elections. Rajaji pronounced the AICC resolution as illegal and wanted it to be opposed. But his was the only dissentient voice against the AICC stand.

The Special Session of the Congress at Delhi in September 1923 marked an important stage in the advance made by the Swarajya Party. Rajaji did not care to attend it. Maulana Azad who presided over the session, passed a compromise resolution permitting those who had no “conscientious objection”, to contest the elections to the Councils and to suspend all propaganda against council entry.<sup>72</sup> The resolution was passed by a majority, marking the great triumph of the Swarajists who could contest the 1923 elections though without the Congress funds or organisation.

A. Rangaswamy Iyengar, journalist of international repute and nationalist leader of great stature, and Satyamurti were the two prominent members of the Swarajya party in the Presidency. The Madras Swarajists had a tough task at the initial stages. In the first place, they had to dispel the misapprehensions and fears of those within the Congress about the programme and objectives of the new party. Secondly, *The Hindu* which supported the council-entry before the Nagpur Congress had lent its formidable support to “no-changers” on this issue. It expressed its “most unpleasant shock” at the manner in which the Swarajists had “defected” from the Congress\*.<sup>73</sup> It shared to some degree the view of Rajaji that the non-Brahmans left to themselves would get over their hatred of Brahmans, “squabble” among themselves and eventually join the Brahmans. Thirdly, the Tamil Swarajists were denied access to the TNCC’s resources until 1925. They had, therefore, to fight the 1923 elections short of funds. Lastly, the *Madras Mail* did its best to exaggerate the so-called “incongruities” of the party’s programme of wrecking the Reforms from within and predicting its doom in the coming elections which would drive the last nail in the coffin of the National Movement in the Madras Presidency.<sup>74</sup>

\* Kasturiranga Iyengar wrote a pungent leader criticising strongly the move for council entry. Satyamurti’s equally pungent rejoinder to *The Hindu* was not published by that paper. But Besant published it in her *New India*. (R. Parthasarathy, *S. Satyamurti*, p. 31).

Considering the hardships of the Swarajists of the Madras Presidency, Motilal Nehru advised them to concentrate on Assembly seats. The result was five of the six Assembly seats for Tamil Nad fell to Swarajists; P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer was the lone Liberal returned. A. Rangaswamy Iyengar got elected to the Assembly by defeating T.V. Seshagiri Iyer by an overwhelming majority. He became the Secretary of the Swarajya Party in the Central Assembly and was acclaimed to be the brain which provided ideas and organised the whole party. The party owed some of its very brilliant achievements in the Central Legislative Assembly to Iyengar's alertness of mind, amazing industry, exhaustive knowledge of constitutional history and theory, and practice of financial matters. In fine, Rangaswamy Iyengar "supplied the sustained intellectual effort and the patience that are required to build up a great party".<sup>75</sup> It was in response to the resolution of the Swarajya party in February 1924 in the Assembly on the unworkability of the Montford Scheme, that the Muddiman Committee was appointed.

In the Presidency, Satyamurti proved equal to the occasion. He undertook a whirlwind tour of all the districts of the Province and delivered brilliant and effective speeches. He took pains to convince the people that the new party was but a wing of the Congress; that it was a "political party with a political vision and a political programme" and not a party of wreckers bent upon destroying and obstructing for the sake of destruction and obstruction with no desire or genius for construction. Inside the legislatures, it would throw out budgets and legislative measures which aimed at consolidating the position of the bureaucracy. More positively, the Swarajists would introduce such resolutions, measures and bills as would facilitate the displacement of the bureaucracy. Furthermore, it would adopt a definite economic policy for the cessation of the country's exploitation. Outside the Councils, the party would continue to be an integral part of the Congress and work for the constructive programme of Gandhiji's non-co-operation. C.R. Das also toured the Presidency to campaign for the Swarajya party. Satyamurti was the only South Indian whose services were requisitioned by Motilal Nehru for Swarajist electioneering in the north. He was so impressed by Satyamurti's oratory and tireless energy that he cabled S. Srinivasa Iyengar to say that he should take every care to keep his *chela* within the fold.<sup>76</sup>

At the 1923 elections, Satyamurti was elected from the Madras University registered graduates constituency. Before the elections,



the All India Swarajya Party promised that it would not occupy seats in the Legislative Councils of those Provinces where it secured a minority. In Madras and the Punjab, the 1923 elections produced minority Swarajist parties. But the Madras Swarajists argued that, though small in number, they had good chances of forming an effective opposition. T. Prakasam who was elected to the Assembly deplored the decision. But his objection was ignored. Because they were so few in number, the Swarajists in the Madras Council made alliance with the other opposition members and formed the United Nationalist Party. Adhering to the advice of Rangaswami Iyengar, Satyamurti took the middle course between abandoning the legislature and attempting a direct assault on it and overthrowing it. The Swarajists were more anxious to dislodge the Justice Party which was too rabidly communal to permit even a limited understanding with the Government than to wreck the Government. This feeling was reflected in Satyamurti's letter to Lord Olivier, Secretary of State for India. Assuring Olivier that the Swarajists were not "political ogres", but were "reasonable, practical and willing to recognise the real imperial obligations", he said they were waiting for a right gesture from the Secretary of State. He added that diarchy had wrought havoc in Madras; the Justice Party which was a communal party with no political faith or programme had been catapulted to power and it had made Madras the Ulster of India. He wrote another letter which contained the warning: "Let not the tragic words 'too late' be written on the Government of India by the Labour Party". Olivier replied to him sharing his views. He observed that the "maintenance of communal system is antagonistic to the possibility of any proper working of democratic institutions in India".<sup>77</sup>

The above letters of Satyamurti may seem paradoxical in alternating between co-operation and non-co-operation with the alien administration. But that was inescapable in the situation in which the Indian National Movement was carried on. This dualism was implicit in the statement of the Swarajist programme as spelt out by Swarajists during their election speeches. Satyamurti had talked of the constructive objectives of his party to be fulfilled even within the framework of alien dispensation. It was as a part of his constructive aspect of their programme that Satyamurti went to England in 1925 to carry on propaganda on behalf of the Swarajya Party.<sup>78</sup>

Before his departure to England, Satyamurti fell out with his

political mentor S. Srinivasa Iyengar who was President of the Swarajya Party of the Presidency. They were the two giants on the Congress side in the Presidency and were primarily responsible for preparing the ground for the National Movement at the grass roots level. And Satyamurti might be regarded the forerunner in the south so far as the use of mother tongue for political awakening and propaganda was concerned. Though the names of "Congress" and "Mahatma Gandhi" were "the electrifying sources which contributed to the success of the Congress . . . it was Satyamurti and Srinivasa Iyengar who spearheaded the fight against reactionary and communal forces led by equally stalwart giants". They were also partly responsible for the resuscitation of the Congress in Malabar which was in a torpid state. They appealed particularly to lawyers and students in April 1925 at the North Malabar District Conference to work for Hindu-Muslim unity, abolition of untouchability, *khadar* propaganda etc. Between such stalwarts differences arose over two points. Satyamurti's alliance with the United Nationalists, which was formed without seeking his advice, annoyed Iyengar. He was against any hobnobbing with the non-Brahman dissidents to defeat the Justice Party. Because of his abhorrence to share the election platform with the United Nationalists in the by-election caused by the death of P. T. Chetty, the Swarajya party did not contest the by-election. Satyamurti blamed Iyengar for this. An irate Iyengar joined issue with him. The second point was Satyamurti's unwillingness to accept Iyengar's leadership. Iyengar said that "while you are willing to accept the implications of leadership in the case of Das and Nehru, you could not accept them in my case".<sup>79</sup>

Amidst this mutual recrimination Satyamurti left for England. A. Rangaswamy Iyengar stood by Satyamurti throughout. During Satyamurti's absence in England, Srinivasa Iyengar was making efforts to revitalise the Swarajya party to prepare for the third elections in 1926. A. Rangaswamy Iyengar in his letters to Satyamurti cautioned him to be wary in his dealings with Iyengar although there was no need "for you to cultivate him".<sup>80</sup> Iyengar had himself mellowed down realising as he did the worth of Satyamurti. He also wrote to Satyamurti and on the latter's return home in August 1925, both came closer together. Iyengar opened election meetings to Satyamurti to speak for the Swarajya party. Thereafter, Satyamurti became the main prop and right hand man of Iyengar.<sup>81</sup>

The Swarajists acquitted themselves exceedingly well in Madras.



They belied the doubt expressed by Rajaji at the Karnataka Provincial Congress whether the Swarajists would at all be able to “withstand the temptations and snares inside the Councils”.<sup>82</sup> In the 1926 elections they won a vast majority of the seats in the Council. The Swarajists contested these elections in the name of the Congress, having been authorised to do so by the Belgaum Congress presided over by Gandhiji. In Madras, the party under the leadership of S. Srinivasa Iyengar won a vast majority of the seats in the Council.

Towards the close of the 1920s or positively by 1930 the party faded out in the sense it was completely merged in the parent body. It was never at any time dissolved. The Swarajists never left the Congress and never sought or maintained a separate identity against or outside the Congress. They were very much members of the Congress before, during and after the formation of the Swarajya party. It was a sub-group of the Congress which accepted all its policies and programmes and obeyed its mandate in all respects save its boycott of council entry. The Swarajists never accepted office. They boycotted the Viceroy along with the Congress when Reading visited Madras in 1923 because his administration was one of “open, deliberate and continuous challenge to the National Movement”.<sup>83</sup> Again when the Congress ordered its members to quit the legislatures in 1929, the Swarajists simply obeyed it. From the day of its inception, it was a party of Congressmen and from the first day of its existence, it sought recognition and approval of its policies and programme by the Congress. Even in the Councils the term Congress was attached to their names. Both “Congress” and “Swarajist” were used. If only the Congress had been more flexible in its attitude towards Council entry, all the confusion would have been averted.

The party was in abeyance from 1930 to 31 March 1934 when it was decided to revive it at a conference in Delhi in April 1934 in which Satyamurti and other Congress leaders participated. In Madras, it had re-emerged as early as October 1933 under the leadership of Satyamurti. Along with those of his colleagues who were disillusioned with the civil disobedience\*, Satyamurti founded it on the initiative of Rangaswamy Iyengar. Its chief objectives were the capture of: (1) the Legislature so as to make the Government act with the fear that they would be answerable to the legislature;

\* *Infra*, Chapters XIV & XV.

(b) the local boards and (c) the condemnation of the White Paper, the preliminary document to the Act of 1935.<sup>84</sup>

At the Congress session at Ranchi held on 2 and 3 May 1934, the aforesaid Delhi decision to revive the All India Swarajya Party was approved. The AICC which met subsequently at Patna on 20 May decided to set up a Congress Election Board to contest the elections to be held in November 1934. The sequel was the end of the Swarajya Party which in the words of Gandhiji, was “absorbed” within the Congress. As *The Hindu* rightly observed what could not be achieved “ten years ago has been achieved to-day. The leaders of the Swarajya Party may well be proud of the fact. The Patna decision is, at the same time, a striking proof that the Congress leadership is abundantly possessed of that realism which its detractors have denied it”.<sup>85</sup>

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

# Diarchy—Uses and abuses of Power

### *Communal Clamour*

Having won the elections in 1920 by a majority which far exceeded the minimum fixed by Meston Award and having in consequence formed the Ministry, the non-Brahman leaders were bent upon fulfilling their hitherto frustrated ambitions. Throughout the period they operated the diarchy, the Justicites were obsessed with the communal issue: the first three years (1921–1923) were a period of communalism running riot. Through resolutions in the Legislative Councils they sought promises from the Executive Council that non-Brahmans would be given preference over the Brahmans in all government appointments and promotions. In other words, they insisted on the application of the principle of communal rotation not only to recruitments but also to promotions. In fine, they stood for communalising everything.

Most of the resolutions brought forth by the members of the ruling Justice party from the inception of the new council were communal in nature. They revealed their extreme anxiety to bring about the speedy non-Brahmanisation of the administrative machinery. They succeeded overwhelmingly and derived immense benefits therefrom in the long run. In their impatience to achieve immediate results, they blamed the Government for doing very little in this direction. A Ranganatha Mudaliar once accused the non-Indian officials as being responsible for the under-representation of non-Brahmans in the services.<sup>1</sup> Any reference to “efficiency” by the British bureaucrats irritated them. Within three months of their entry into the Legislature, the Justicites began to complain that the non-Brahmans remained where they were five years earlier and attributed this state of affairs to “jobbery, favouritism and bureaucratic arrogance”.<sup>2</sup>

The first communal resolution was moved by O. Thanickachalam Chetty on 2 April 1921. It recommended the transference of the power to appoint District Munsiffs, then vested in the High Court, to the Government.<sup>3</sup> The supporters of the motion con-

tended that since the Brahmans dominated the judiciary, they could expect justice only from the Government. The mover, however, withdrew his motion when he was confronted with the relevant statistics by the Law Member K. Srinivasa Iyengar. In 1919, the High Court of Madras had before them a total of 162 applicants—135 Brahmans, 23 non-Brahmans, 3 Indian Christians and 1 Mohammadan out of which appointments were offered to 18 Brahmans, 11 non-Brahmans, 2 Indian Christians and 1 Mohammadan which worked out to 12 per cent, 48 per cent, 67 per cent and 100 per cent respectively.<sup>4</sup>

On 5 August 1921, Thanickachalam Chetty\* brought another communal resolution with a view to remedying the “long standing, deep-seated and festering sore” from which the non-Brahman caste had been suffering. The motion required heads of all Government departments to classify new recruits in terms of their communal labels: Brahmans, non-Brahmans, Indian Christians, Mohammadans, Europeans and Anglo Indians. The authorities making appointments to public services had to give preference to candidates from the non-Brahman communities until a proportion of at least 66 per cent of posts carrying a salary of Rs. 100/- per mensem and upwards and a proportion of 75 per cent of posts carrying a salary of less than Rs. 100 were reached “within a period of 7 years from that date”. As for qualifications, the resolution stated that it should be enough if the candidates possessed the minimum qualifications prescribed by the rules relating to appointments to the public services although they might be less qualified than the Brahman candidates.<sup>5</sup>

Thanickachalam Chetty was however amenable to reason when the Home Member Knapp referred to him the Board’s Standing Order of 1854.\*\* He also accepted the amendment suggested. Knapp’s amendment was that the principles prescribed for the Revenue Department in the Board’s Standing Order should at once be extended to other departments of the Government. They should

\* Stalwart of the Justice Party; member of the Madras Corporation and of the Pachaiyappa’s Trust Board; founder member of the Beri Chetty Sangam.

\*\* “The Collectors should be able to see that the subordinate appointments in their districts are not monopolised by the members of a few influential families. Endeavour should always be made to divide the principal appointments in each district among the several castes. A proportion of Tahsildars in each district should belong to castes other than the Brahmans and it should be a standing rule that the two chief revenue servants in the Collector’s Office should be of different castes”.



be made applicable not merely to the principal appointments but to posts of all grades. The Government should issue orders accordingly and insist on their being enforced. To this end, half-yearly returns showing the progress made in this direction should be submitted by the Head of each office. The Members of the Legislative Council should have access to such periodical returns. O. Thanickachalam Chetty's resolution as amended by Knapp was passed by the Council unanimously. But this resolution also was not put into practice by the Government.

So, again on 13 September 1922, C. Natesa Mudaliar recommended that in giving effect to the various communal resolutions passed by the Council, the Government should, in the event of non-availability of non-Brahman candidates in the higher grades, promote those of the lower ranks with the minimum requisite qualifications. But this was also withdrawn by the mover when the leader of the House, Charles Todhunter, pointed that he had already caused the G.O.No.658 dated 15 August 1922 to be passed to give effect to the various communal resolutions passed in the Council. Thereupon profusely thanking the European member, Natesa Mudaliar gave a rash compliment to him and to the race of Indian Civil Service. He shocked not a few when he said that if the ICS Officers were all of Todhunter's type his devout wish would be that "the Indianisation of the Service in that branch comes rather slowly. . . . It is such type of ICS Officers that should form the steel frame of the ICS to do the good work of a splint to the fractured Indian Nation, fractured to every bone by being split to pieces by the clashing interests of the various communities, creeds and castes".<sup>6</sup> In reality, the communal innovations of the Non-Brahman Party aroused the indignation of a good many ICS officials as efficiency and merit became the casualties under communal considerations. "The harder the Justice party pressed the *reserved* half of the Government in its pursuit of patronage, the more unsympathetic the European officials became".<sup>7</sup>

Some of the Justice members carried the communal spirit a little too far when they expressed their desire to raise the retiring age of the non-Brahmans holding non-Ministerial appointments from 55 to 60 for a period of ten years from 1922. The motive behind such a resolution was to retain in service people who "by rule and by their age were unfit to be in service any longer". In view of the strong opposition to it, the motion was withdrawn. The mover was convinced by his non-Brahman friends that the interests of

their caste were safe in the hands of the Government.<sup>8</sup>

On 7 February 1925, C. Natesa Mudaliar brought in another motion recommending that at least 40 per cent of the posts in both the lower and upper grades of the services under Government be reserved to the non-Brahman Hindus, 10 per cent to the depressed classes, 15 per cent to the Mohammadans, 10 per cent to the Indian Christians, 10 per cent to the Brahmans and the rest for the other communities. Natesa Mudaliar made an extreme statement on this occasion too. He said that the Indian population which consisted of such "caste-tight, community-tight and race-right compartment" differed as much from one another as from the people of other countries! To a comment from a member that there was no change of heart in him where the communal question was concerned even after his having crossed the floor and gone to the opposition, Natesa Mudaliar replied with great gusto that he stood stronger for it now than ever before!<sup>9</sup> In December of the same year, while the House was discussing the plight of the depressed classes, Natesa Mudaliar called the Brahman a cobra "which infused poison in our veins". But when the President peremptorily ordered him to withdraw that expression he did so.<sup>10</sup>

The non-Brahman members were impatient. They began to complain that though their resolutions were carried in the council none was given effect to. Sensing that the communal G.Os. were honoured more in the breach than in the observance, the non-Brahman members pinned their only hope on the newly constituted Staff Selection Board. This body was set up in February 1924 by the Madras Government to supervise the appointments made on communal lines. When this Board also did not work to the satisfaction of the non-Brahman members, Thanickachalam Chetty asked the Government to leave the matter to the representatives of the people to settle it in their own way.

At the meeting of the Council in March 1925, the members discussed at length the problem of communal appointments taking all the while the mistaken stand that the object of the public services was to provide means of livelihood for the members of this or that community. Intervening in the discussion R.A. Graham, Finance Member pointed out that the Government's duty was to provide for an administration which worked efficiently as well as economically. The requirements of recruitment were: there was to be no more posts than were required; the pay should be handsome enough



to attract men of necessary qualification; and the work turned out by each man was to be commensurate with the salary paid. Since these requirements were incompatible with recruitment purely on a communal basis, Graham ventured to say that the Government would be failing in its duty to tax-payers generally "if we are allowed considerations of caste to override entirely considerations of efficiency". Graham was hopeful that no member would entertain the extreme view that members of the unrepresented castes should be taken into service without regard to their qualifications or that disregarding the qualifications and seniority of service of other caste members, they should be "pitch-forked" into the highest positions.<sup>11</sup>

As noted at the outset, in their undue haste to achieve the target they had set, the non-Brahmans failed to notice the steady reduction in the number of Brahmans appointed. Statistics showed beyond doubt that the number of Brahmans recruited since the issue of G.Os. of 1921 and 1922 was considerably less than it was before. Within a short span of 2 to 3 years during which the Communal G.Os. had been in force, the rate of progress made was far from being slow. If it had to be still quicker, then there had to be an order providing for the exclusion of Brahmans. At one stage of the debate, Graham asked the House whether they wanted the Brahmans to be totally eliminated. P. Kesava Pillai forthwith said "NO". Surprisingly even P. T. Chetty said categorically that his party never wanted such complete exclusion of Brahmans.<sup>12</sup> However, when Graham reiterated that the G.O. could not be expected to work better than it did if the Brahmans were not to be excluded, Thanickachalam Chetty and K. V. Reddy Naidu had no qualms about advocating the ending of appointments of Brahmans for some years!<sup>13</sup>

It was thus clear that the first Montford Legislative Council in Madras hardly ever functioned as a deliberative body whose chief functions ought to be to force the executive to formulate suitable developmental programmes and to criticise and supervise their progress. Instead, the legislature was converted into a battleground of parochial communal considerations and personal ambitions. Every Councillor of the ruling party considered no pain too great to secure as many offices and privileges as he could for the members of his caste.<sup>14</sup> The crux of the whole issue was that members of the Justice party were inexperienced and knew no politics. Little wonder that their political activities were inextricably intermixed

with purely communal matters which only earned them the reprobation of men of their own castes.

*Willingdon's Share:*

Governor Willingdon himself encouraged the communal principle. Though initially he opposed it and deplored the anti-Brahman sentiment among the British Officials in the Presidency, he soon changed his attitude and countenanced the ruling party's professed creed of communal exclusionism and communal spoilation. Having appointed a non-Brahman Ministry, he urged the non-Brahman MLCs to form a single team and act unitedly in debates and divisions. Willingdon kindled caste animosity in the very first session of the Legislative Council when he ordered the non-official seats to be arranged on a basis of caste status. Distinct blocks of seats were allotted to Brahmans, non-Brahmans, Mohammadans, Zamindars and Deppressed classes.<sup>15</sup> He had a docile Council which had no intention of making an inconvenient use of what powers it possessed and a pliable Ministry which was only too willing to work hand in glove with the Governor to bolster up British vested interests in India. Finding himself an uncrowned monarch, the Governor often boasted of his "harmonius menage" and allowed his Ministers a free hand to promote their communal self-interest. He once said that the non-Brahmans were better parliamentarians than Brahmans. To prove it, he made a comparative statement: "... the Brahman is generally speaking too intellectual, too legal minded, too fond of taking small points (but) he cannot compete with the non-Brahman who is a stouter, more commonsense (sic) and practical individual all round".<sup>16</sup> In return for this testimonial, his "happy family" willingly collaborated with Willingdon in his reckless career of severe repression prosecuted against the non-co-operators.

Willingdon's recommendations in respect of appointments in the High Court made even Montagu uneasy. Objecting to the over-emphasis on the fact of one being a non-Brahman, the Secretary of State for India wrote: "... Does this mean that there is no Brahman candidate comparable on his merits to the non-Brahman, or does it mean that if a non-Brahman is even by a shade not quite so good as any available Brahman, you would still prefer the former? Candidly, I do not like the latter kind of argument when we are dealing with these vacancies. . . ." <sup>17</sup>



Nemesis overtook the party when in November 1923, following a split in the party, one of its own members C. Ramalinga Reddy, who had crossed the floor moved a no-confidence motion against the Ministry. The motion very nearly wrecked the second Ministry headed by the Raja of Panagal. No doubt the Ministry survived it. But the motion exposed the true colours of the Justice Ministry.

Though the Justicites no longer feared the Brahman as they did prior to the first elections, the feeling against him did not die down. When the Registrar of Co-operative Societies went on leave to London in July 1926, Governor Goschen suggested the appointment of an Indian—one of the Government Secretaries to the post. He was an extremely able man who had studied the question of co-operative societies. But the Ministers would not agree. They came in a body to the Governor to ask for the appointment of an Englishman simply because, the candidate recommended by the Governor was a Brahman. With the third elections at hand, the Ministers feared that the new Brahman Registrar with his power to control the issue of loans might influence the elections. The Governor pointed out that by getting an Indian appointed to that post, the ministers were obtaining what they had all along been demanding, namely, Indianisation of services and increased opportunities of responsibility. He also assured them that the person recommended was the best available one for the post and that they should not be biased by purely communal feelings. Horror stricken at the Governor's justification, the first Minister seemed to have rushed to the room of a member of the Council and asked him: "What has come over the Governor? He is in favour of Indianisation". This query drove the Governor to conclude that "the nearer the Ministers approach the stream of their desire, the more reluctant they become to take off their English clothes and plunge in".<sup>18</sup>

### *People's verdict:*

The party's debacle in the 1926 elections was proof of the wholehearted repudiation by the public of communalism as a political principle. The majority of the non-Brahmans themselves, both in the Council and outside, had lost confidence in the party whose performance they felt was no better in its second innings. From 1923 to 1926, it tried to consolidate its power "by distribution of patronage by open favouritism, (and) by perpetuating jobbery".<sup>19</sup> The communal principle was not confined to government service alone.

It was extended to admission of students in government educational institutions and to the realm of the local self-government in respect of appointments of Presidents of District Boards. As Minister for Local Self Government, the Raja of Panagal had the patronage and authority hitherto enjoyed by the District Collectors. The sagacious Chief Minister exercised these powers to reward his friends and penalise his foes.<sup>20</sup>

The public which was suffering on account of the party's communal policy and its various appointments on communal lines did the right thing by utilising the "opportunity offered by elections to demonstrate its disgust with the vicious principle".<sup>21</sup> Though the Raja of Panagal was returned, his Ministry was beaten in the elections of 1926. The Congress party which was better organised had its funds increased by subscriptions raised from the mutts which were antagonised by the Justice Ministry's Hindu Religious Endowments Bill.<sup>22</sup>

Even when they were out of office, the Justicites' war against Brahmans occupying higher echelons of administration continued unabated. One of the motions adopted at the Non-Brahman Confederation at Coimbatore in July 1927 was a vote of no-confidence in the Law Member, C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer. He was singled out for condemnation and was accused of strengthening the monopoly of offices by a particular community. This had an obvious reference to the judicial appointments. But the charge was baseless. The list clearly showed that as many non-Brahmans, Christians and Mohammadans as Brahmans had been appointed. There were of course a dozen Brahmans at the top of the list. But they attained that position before Ramaswamy Iyer assumed charge. Justifying their appointments, Governor Goschen said that they were rightly selected for their qualifications which "as a rule are far superior to those of non-Brahmans".<sup>23</sup>

About this time, speaking at a function got up to felicitate U. Rama Rao, a Swarajist, on his success in the 1926 elections, Rajaji remarked that Rao's victory over a Justicite did not mean the end of all anti-Brahman feeling in the Presidency. So long as there existed the race for jobs, hatred and enmity against Brahmans would continue, he said. Since a large number of Brahmans was present on the occasion, Rajaji advised them to stop job hunting and follow in the footsteps of their ancestors who believed in simple living and high thinking.<sup>24</sup> Rajaji wanted the Brahmans to pursue their *kula dharma* leaving the field of public services to



the non-Brahmans. This exhortation, absolutely outmoded, was obviously never taken seriously.

The communal elements introduced freely by the Justice Ministry in the services and in the sphere of education took so deep a root in the Presidency that it was carried on with as much vigour by the Ministries that succeeded it even after independence was gained.\*

### *The Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act*

If the first Legislative Council of Madras under the Act of 1919 was obsessed by the communal principle, the second one was dominated by two issues namely, the legislation over the Hindu Religious Endowments in the Presidency and the disturbance in Tanjore over the land resettlement. The enormously wealthy and highly influential Hindu Religious Endowments became the target of criticism by the ministerial party in the first Council itself. It was its legislation in this area towards the fag end of the term of the first council that aroused the keen opposition of many non-Brahmans themselves. Especially, the provisions for the diversion of the surplus funds of such endowments to secular purposes came under severe public censures. The results of the second elections held in 1923 reflected this bitterness of feeling. Subsequently, in the second Council also the Justice Ministry handled this measure of great importance so cavalierly that it contributed to its rout in the third elections of 1926.

Until the introduction of the Hindu Religious Endowments Bill in 1922, the religious institutions in Madras were covered by the Acts XX of 1863 and XIV of 1920. The ruling party felt the former too outdated as the remedies provided therein had become utterly inadequate to cope with the abuses that had sprung up in the administration of the religious institutions. The latter though modern, was found to be too limited in its scope to remedy the defects of the former.<sup>25</sup> Of course, the question of amending the Religious Endowments Act had long been exercising the minds of the public in the Presidency but none of their efforts proved fruitful. It therefore became a standing complaint of the public that the Government of

\* After the first general elections of 1952, E. V. Ramaswami Naicker pressurised the Congress Government under Rajaji so much to accept the communal principle that the latter had ultimately to give in. The sequel was that in the Madras Presidency the Communal reservation became the "sheet anchor" of successive Congress Ministries and their non-Congress successors.

India was not inclined to support any effective legislation towards ensuring the proper administration of religious endowments.<sup>26\*</sup>

Repeated refusals on the part of the Government of India nullified all efforts at legislation in the area of Hindu religious endowments. However the objection of the Government of India could not be called unreasonable because they wanted to be extremely cautious in a matter of great delicacy like religion. Being themselves of a foreign race and religion, the British were far-sighted enough to realise the dangers of interference in the religion of the colonial population.

Even the Montford Report had adhered to the view that religious questions and belief should not be interfered with by the State. When Religious Endowments became a *Transferred* subject under diarchy, it provided an opportunity for the Indian Ministry to deal with this long-standing question. It was expected of the elected Ministry to reform the Hindu Religious Endowments which was long overdue and to set right the mismanagement of funds in certain temples. But the procedure they adopted disillusioned many. It even paved the way for their ultimate downfall. The elected Ministry which set about the task of reforming the Hindu Religious Endowments in the Presidency in all haste had the "hardihood" to pass its Bill in the teeth of unanimous opposition throughout the Presidency.

### *Hasty Legislation:*

This Bill containing 45 clauses was drafted by a Committee headed by the Raja of Ramnad. Of these 14 clauses were sent by the Madras Government to the Governor General of India for his sanction in October 1922. The latter granted sanction for 5 of the 14 clauses; considered sanction unnecessary in respect of 5; and suggested modifications for the remainder quite possibly on the basis of advice from competent indigenous authorities on the matter. In December 1922, the Bill was introduced in the Legislative Council where after a debate it was referred to a Select Committee of 27 members appointed by the Council.<sup>27</sup> This Committee

\* The Government of India did not sanction any of the following Bills drafted to amend the Act of 1863: Rama Rao's Bill (1870); Robinson Committee Bill (1878); Sullivan Committee Bill (1886); Muthuswamy Iyer Committee Bill (1893); G. Srinvasa Rao's Bill (1903); and the Bill prepared jointly by L. A. Govindaraghava Iyer and T. V. Seshagiri Iyer.



submitted its report in 1923 after carrying out extensive alterations. Once again the Madras Government had to apply to the Government of India in February 1923 to obtain its sanction for the altered provisions. The latter wired to the Madras Government on 5 March seeking clarification in respect of a certain clause which was not among those included for sanction. The Madras Government furnished the information required but did not hear anything regarding it from the Government of India thereafter.

When the life of the first council was about to end the Bill was rushed through and passed by the Council at such breakneck speed flouting all public opinion. It was done in the teeth of fierce opposition giving no time to the House to debate the revised Bill. Public opinion was not consulted before its passage in the Council. There was widespread criticism from both Brahmans and non-Brahmans who felt that the Bill was unnecessarily vindictive. Satyamurti denounced it as the "death-bed gift of the Ministry".<sup>28</sup> T. Ranga-chari\* called it "a pernicious measure".<sup>29</sup> The indifference in the attitude of the Government as evinced in not deferring the consideration of the amended Bill, left much to be desired. It exposed itself to the suspicion, a very justifiable one, of seeking to pass the Bill with undue haste to earn the credit for a legislative achievement!

It was averred by the protagonists of the Bill that it aimed at the discontinuance of "vested interests" in their career of mismanagement. But the Bill only succeeded in replacing one evil by another of a greater magnitude. Who could deny that the endowments became a potential source for ministerial patronage? As the *Swarajya* characterised it, the Justice party was a "Colossus bestriding the Presidency with one foot firmly planted in the Mutts (monasteries) and temples and the other in the local and district boards".<sup>30</sup>

Opposition to the Bill was gathering momentum but it did not in any way affect either the Governor or the Ministers. In fact, Willingdon welcomed the Bill. He had always felt that the Brahmans, a minority caste, enjoyed undue advantages by happily acting as priests in temples and generously dispensing large sums of money donated by the devotees majority of whom were non-Brahmans.<sup>31</sup> However, as public protests assumed serious proportions, the Viceroy was obliged to reserve his assent to the Bill. He

\* From Tanjore; one of the most able lawyers of his generation.

preferred to defer his assent until he himself visited the Presidency. Willingdon also accepted the Viceroy's decision for two reasons: in the first place, the results of the elections which were round the corner would give the Government an indication of public feeling on the Bill; and secondly he was anxious that the Viceroy should himself meet and talk to influential men at Madras who would give him a fair perspective of the issue. "You ought to hear of the opinion of the 'man in the street' and that you can get only in Madras", he wrote.<sup>32</sup>

The Viceroy visited Madras in December 1923 and held discussions with the Law Member and the first Minister, the Raja of Panagal. They deliberated particularly on the legality of remitting a Bill passed by the previous Council before its dissolution to the new council reconstituted by a general election. The Viceroy ruled that such a return was not illegal under the Government of India Act whatever might be the practice in other countries. The Viceroy followed up his discussion at Madras by his Memorandum of February 1924 giving a list of the specific alterations which he wanted to be carried out in the Bill.<sup>33</sup>

The delay caused by the Viceroy's assent to the Bill enabled those opposed to it to gain strength. At the second elections to the Council, this Bill was their main target of attack. But the Ministry survived the attack as well as the No-Confidence motion brought against it in November 1923. During the debate on this motion, the Hindu Religious Endowments Bill figured prominently.

When the new Council met, Willingdon took counsel with his Ministers, reckoned the amendments suggested by the Viceroy, got their assent—if not their enthusiastic approval, and quietly asked the new Council to consider not the Bill but only the amendments thereto.

This was how the drama was enacted. On 17 March 1924, the Governor sent a message recommending some amendments to the Bill already passed by the House. On 1 April 1924, he transmitted a further message to the effect that he would accept only the amendments already recommended. The amendments recommended by him did not please several members of the Ministerial party who had supported the Bill in 1923. The Raja of Ramnad and K. V. Reddy Naidu were the most prominent of these. On 2 April 1924, when the first amendment of the Governor was read in the Council, the Raja of Ramnad moved that the consideration of the Governor's



message could be postponed to a date in March 1925. But his motion was negatived.<sup>34</sup>

The Ministry which had agreed to support these amendments in deference to the Viceroy's wishes found itself in an awkward predicament. But they braved the opposition even from friends and ultimately carried with them the majority of the Council. On 3 April 1924, all the five amendments recommended by the Governor were carried *nem con.* The Bill was passed without being referred to a Select Committee. On 31 March Willingdon had informed the Viceroy that he would push through the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Bill before he left Madras at the end of his term. "What will be the result I know not . . . but I live in hopes that I shan't have a ministerial crisis just before I disappear".<sup>35</sup> Even the successor of Willingdon proudly emphasised the fact that the Legislative Council had twice expressed its approval of the legislation over the Hindu Religious Endowments and supported the Ministers.<sup>36</sup> Later, however he revised his opinion.

But the Viceroy was much perturbed over the disquiet in the Presidency on account of this legislation. He received an endless array of petitions and deputations from the heads of mutts and trustees of temples supporting the contention that the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act should not become law. Goschen who feared a constitutional crisis if the Viceroy withheld his consent to the Bill wrote to him that even after he had assented to the Bill, if in its working the Act proved defective, an amending Act could be introduced to remove any defects.<sup>37</sup>

In October 1924, Viceroy Reading informed Goschen of his intention to give effect to the Bill by assenting to it but on the assurance that the Governor would readily introduce an amending Bill to undo any injustice<sup>38</sup>. On 2 January 1925, the Viceroy gave his assent to the Madras Hindu Religious Endowment Act having been satisfied that the measure as a whole was "a fair piece of legislation".<sup>39</sup>

#### *Bill to re-enact the Hindu Religious Endowments Act:*

Many cases were filed in the High Court in the wake of the enactment of the Hindu Religious Endowment Act of 1923. The embarrassed Chief Minister wriggled himself out of the situation by bringing another Bill to re-enact the original Act. And he chose

to introduce it again at the fag end of the tenure of the second Council—thus failing once again to give sufficient time for the Hindu public to deliberate on the measure. On 24 August 1926, an adjournment motion was introduced in the Council seeking postponement of the consideration of the Bill. It was done on the genuine ground that the impending elections would not allow the kind of calmness, detachment and impartiality necessary to consider such a measure of first class legislative importance. The Hindu public would have to debate its various aspects and pronounce its considered opinion in accordance with the rules and Standing Orders of the Council.<sup>40</sup> Favoursing the motion Satyamurti observed that it had become the fashion with the Justice Ministry to “legislate in haste and to repent at leisure”. He also challenged the Chief Minister to cite a single instance in the history of British Parliament, after which the Madras legislature had been modelled, when at the fag end of a term the majority party forced an important legislation at such a dangerous pace as to require the Speaker to suspend the Standing Orders twice smothering thereby the rights of the minorities.<sup>41</sup> But the motion was lost.

The adjournment motion having been defeated, the Bill came up for discussion the following day. It was opposed as a confiscatory legislation which forced heterodox traditions and usages into Hindu temples and mutts. It militated against the policy of religious neutrality scrupulously followed by the British all along. The Bill also provided for undue interference with the Hindu forms of worship by empowering the Control Board, a secular body, to pry into the internal management of temples and mutts. Simply because there was “a kind of *Transferred* half, a kind of simulacrum of self-government called Diarchy”, the ruling party had made bold to violate the principles contained in section 22 of the Imperial Act XX of 1863 which forbade any government in India to undertake superintendence of any land belonging to any religious establishment. This provision was inserted with the deliberate intention of ousting the jurisdiction of the civil courts. The Board being authorised to settle all disputes, the unfortunate trustee or the person affected could not go to a court of law. It could also direct what it considered extra-funds to any other purpose inconsistent with the original objects of the Trust. The application of the *cypres* doctrine to temples and mutts was intended to make the Hindu religious institutions a department of the Government.<sup>42</sup>

But the most unjust provision was that which vested in the



Government the right of arbitrary exemption of temples from official control. Obviously the intention was to protect the interests of the ruling party which was dying and so was in dire need of some prop or other to keep it going rather than to safeguard the interests of the temples. The Justice party wanted “to create a political electoral machinery from Berhampur to Tuticorin to act as agencies who will get votes for the party. . . .”<sup>43</sup>

Even Goschen who originally dittoed the opinion of Willingdon wrote in 1926 that he had not held the views of his predecessor in respect of the Bill which, in his opinion, was one which ought to be reserved.<sup>44</sup> The Governor had a difficult time with the First Minister—the Raja of Panagal, the architect of the Bill, who maintained that if Goschen reserved the Bill it would be a slight on Willingdon and on himself. Goschen entirely demurred to his point of view stating that he was called upon to consider a different situation. He also pointed out that their hasty action had resulted in an *impasse* necessitating a re-enactment Bill.<sup>45</sup>

The Bill was discussed on 24 August and 17 September 1926. On the last date while the debate on it was still going on, the President prorogued the Council acting on a message of the Governor. The Raja of Panagal made some indiscreet remarks in the Council implying this: as there were no amendments to the Bill and sanction had been obtained for it, the Governor should give his assent or word to that effect.<sup>46</sup> The Bill became law in 1927. Its sponsors flouted public opinion by refusing so much as to remove a comma from the Bill in spite of strong and influential opposition and in the face of sound and incontrovertible arguments. The Act did nothing appreciable. Litigations increased enormously in all the district courts. Temples had fallen into a state of anarchy as the Commissioner had no power to administer justice. The subordinate officials appropriated the income of the *archakas* and their tenants. The condition of the temples was in no way better while their properties were gradually diminishing.<sup>47</sup>

The Hindu Religious Endowments Act was the main if not the exclusive cause for the reverses the Justice party suffered in the 1926 elections. Tired of “an inverted system of government which confined power to a particular section of the population kept together by no greater bond than the unlimited opportunity it enjoys for jobbery and guided by no higher principle than of ill-will against another community”, the wise electorate of the Presidency gave the right verdict.<sup>48</sup>

### *Resettlement of Land Revenue in Tanjore*

Viceroy Irwin made a most outspoken and touching statement concerning the lot of the South Indian land revenue payer: the grief of the already overtaxed ryot would become more poignant if he drew "any comparison between the contribution to the national revenues of the Income Tax payer and the land revenue payer . . . indeed it is very evident how much combustible material there is lying about. We must prevent it catching fire. I confess I myself entertain some sympathy for the land revenue payer, as compared with the man who pays Income Tax. The principles by which the latter is taxed are clearly defined by Statute, and if he differs from the Income Tax authorities about the interpretation of these principles, he can demand a reference to the High Court. . . . The land revenue payer is in a very different case. . . ." <sup>49</sup>

If the lot of the land revenue payers was bad in the whole of the Presidency of Madras, it was worse in the Tanjore District. The treatment meted out to the revenue payers of the Tanjore district by the ruling Justice party during the second term of their office (1923–26) was another major factor that estranged them from their own well-wishers. It also proved that diarchy paid no more than lip service to the "Shibboleths of democracy". <sup>50</sup> The misery of the *mirasdars* of Tanjore was a long-drawn-out affair during which they mutely bore the burden of a progressively increasing tax. Their ultimate resort to agitation highlighted the justifiable demand on the part of the public for a codification of the principles of assessment prior to undertaking resettlement.

Owing to political uncertainties different systems of land revenue were adopted at different periods by the British in South India. Though Madras was the first settlement of the British, the revenue system had long been neglected there. Land revenue was regarded as mere business of tax gathering and the collectors a set of tax-gatherers. None of the higher officials of the Revenue department cared to acquire a knowledge of the details of land tenure and revenue until the arrival of Thomas Munro in 1792. <sup>51</sup> \* Tanjore dis-

\* Munro ruled the Presidency from 1820–27. It was however his work as District Collector and Special Commissioner on judicial reform prior to his appointment as Governor, that endeared him so much to the people of the Presidency who looked upon him as their "Father". He was revered as *Munrolappa* (Father Munro).

Read and Munro devised the *ryotwari* system which established direct relations between the ryot and the Government, the former paying his revenue to the latter without the mediation of an intervening *Zamindar* class. Three quarters of the Madras Presidency came under this system.



trict was the worst affected by the failure of the Government to embody the general principles of land assessment in legislation. Along the *Cauveri* delta where the *ryotwari* system came to prevail, the ryots had no guarantee of a stable and equitable incidence of land tax. The official assessment of land revenue, which was the basis for the tax levy, fluctuated on account of frequent resurveys and resettlements much to the detriment of the permanent prosperity of the agricultural population. Though it was held that resettlement did not necessarily mean an enhancement of revenue, facts had proved to the contrary: resettlements invariably enhanced the levy of land revenue. The uncertainty and disquiet that prevailed over agricultural land was the chief cause for the emigration of a sizeable rural population of the Presidency to colonies outside India.

*An erroneous impression:*

The Tanjore delta, a gift of *Cauveri*, was no doubt the granary of Tamil Nad. It was proverbially eulogised as *Chonadu Chorud-daittu*—"the Chola region which could boast of freedom from hunger for its people." But its resources were very thoroughly exploited over the centuries. Nevertheless, thanks to its image of fertility, its resources were persistently overestimated. The European member G. F. Paddison said that he was yet to hear of a famine in Tanjore. The Government really laboured under the delusion that the district "has waxed quickest on plenty and prosperity and is kicking against taxes out of its fulness", as a member charged in the Council.<sup>52</sup> It never struck the administration that agricultural Tanjore could not always be prosperous as the fertility of its fields was subject to the vagaries of the monsoon and that the prosperity of agricultural provinces depended upon the prosperity of the ryots. Tanjore had also experienced failures of monsoon, occasional droughts and unseasonal rains. In 1883, the heavy rains of winter damaged the paddy crops in Tanjore district so badly in several parts of the district that a large portion of the revenue had to be remitted by the Government.<sup>53</sup> There was another erroneous impression that all the Tanjore *mirasdars* were large land holders and that the number of such landlords was much higher in the *Cauveri* area than elsewhere in *ryotwari* Madras.<sup>54</sup> Proceeding on such wrong premises, the Government unfairly judged the whole district by a few affluent *mirasdars*. Taluks like Arantangi and Pattukkottai had no irrigation system at all worth its name and

ryots there had to depend solely on the monsoon rains which were rare.

In 1888, the Government of Madras notified to the Government of India their decision against any increase in revenue as Tanjore was already too heavily taxed. Disregarding this, the Government of India began resettlement operations in the district in 1892. Determined to squeeze out a substantial amount as the Presidency's contribution to the Indian Exchequer, the Central Government enhanced the land tax in Tanjore district by 29 per cent. The Madras Government also did not bother to safeguard the legitimate interests of Tanjore. Perhaps it felt that its duty ended with informing the centre of its decision. For instance, the Resettlement Report of 1892 stated that the irrigation facilities in the Tanjore district were very bad and required vast improvement.<sup>55</sup> But even three decades thereafter the Madras Government did nothing to improve the irrigation and drainage facilities in Tanjore. On the other hand, while people were crying for permanent settlement, resettlement was allowed to go on as merrily as ever. And in most cases it was done without a properly conducted enquiry into the economic conditions of the ryots especially of the owners of smaller holdings who constituted a sizeable majority. That the bulk of these small landholders lived from hand to mouth was conveniently ignored. Ninety nine per cent of the so-called *mirasdars* of Tanjore were poor landholders paying *kist* of not more than 10 or 15 rupees. Many nationalist leaders who were not unfriendly with the Government warned the latter against the injustice and inadvisability of enhancing the assessment which would ultimately "reduce the ryot to be a farm servant, when he is able-bodied and enterprising, (and) to emigrate as a labourer to serve some unsympathetic foreigner".<sup>56</sup>

Even Thomas Munro, the author of the *ryotwari* system, clearly emphasised the need for fixed assessment. Giving evidence before the House of Commons he sated: "The principle of the *ryotwari* is to fix an assessment upon the whole land of the country. This assessment is permanent. Every *ryot* who is likewise a cultivating proprietor of the land which he holds is permitted to hold that land at a fixed assessment as long as he pleases. He holds it for ever without any additional assessment".<sup>57</sup> The Madras ryot could thus never be ejected by the Government so long as he paid the fixed assessment. He could retain his land perpetually without any increase of assessment.

The suggestion for legislation embodying the principles of land



assessment instead of leaving them to executive order was made as early as 1909 by the Royal Commission on Decentralisation. According to the Commission, the two main points which had to be dealt with by such legislation were the portion of the net profits on the land which should accrue to the Government and the period of settlements. But the Government of the day believed in separate settlements based on the needs and circumstances of the area under settlement.<sup>58</sup> The Montford Reforms once again brought into prominence the question of giving a statutory status to the principles of land assessment. This issue attracted the special attention of the Joint Select Committee on the Government of India Bill (1919). The Committee was impressed by the genuine objection of many members to the imposition of certain types of taxes on the people which were never brought within the purview of the legislature but were done purely at the discretion of the executive Government. It irked the Committee to find that the people who were the victims of such unjust taxation had no voice in shaping the system. It stated in its Report of November 1919 that “the time has come to embody under law the main principles by which the land revenue is determined, the methods of valuation, the pitch of assessment, the periods of revision, the gradation of enhancements and the other chief processes which touch the well-being of the revenue payers”.<sup>59</sup>

### *Supercilious attitude :*

In April 1920, the Madras Government requested the Board of Revenue to prepare the draft of a Bill embracing the aforesaid recommendations concerning the welfare of the revenue payers. When the Board submitted its Bill in March 1921 the Montford constitution had already come into operation and the new Legislative Council was functioning. The Board drafted the Bill in accordance with the instructions it received and suggested *inter alia* the posting of an experienced officer well-versed in revenue administration on special duty in the department. But neither the Bill nor the suggestion of the Board of Revenue was accepted by the Government. Instead it appointed a Committee to make recommendations on which to draft the Bill.<sup>60</sup>

This Committee had fourteen members\* of whom five were

\* M. Habib-ul-lah, M. Mac Michael, G. T. Boag, A.H.A. Todd, E.S. Lloyd, J. Venkatanarayana Naidu, C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, Vasudeva Raja, T. Somasundara Mudaliar, S.T. Shanmukham Pillai, M. Krishnan Nair, V.K. Ramanuja Achariar. T.N. Sivagnanam Pillai and P. Subbaroyan.

elected members of the Legislative Council. It began its sittings in June and submitted its report in September. This Committee made it plain that there was a strong feeling among certain sections in the Presidency in favour of some form of permanent settlement which would leave the cultivator with a fairer share of the profit from his own efforts and improvements. This opinion was shared by some of the members of the Committee also. The Committee heard the views of the representatives of the Madras Ryotwari Landholders' Association about revenue settlement. It also received a resolution passed at a meeting of the ryots of the Bellary district which was due for resettlement. The resolution urged that "hereafter resettlement should be abolished in the case of ryotwari proprietors and that permanent settlement may be introduced on the basis of the now existing rates". This meeting added a further resolution: "that in any case all resettlement proposals should receive the positive sanction of the Legislature before their introduction". The Committee made special mention of these resolutions in its report because they were in accordance with its own view. The Committee's report as well as its Bill—the Madras Permanent Assessment Bill—had not been made public until 1924. Which meant that even after a lapse of four years and a half the Government did nothing to give effect to the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee to take revenue settlement out of the hands of the executive and place it under the control of the legislature. Taxation which must have the sanction of the legislature continued to be levied by executive order in the case of land revenue.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile in August 1922, the Government announced the enhancement of land revenue in the Tanjore district by another 25 per cent in the case of wet lands and  $18\frac{3}{4}$  per cent in dry lands. As a result, a sum of Rs. 55,00,000 was levied as assessment in Tanjore district alone which had a cultivated area of about 11,00,000 acres. This worked up to an average of Rs. 5-8-0 per acre whereas the average for the whole Presidency was only Rs. 2 or 2-1-0. In other words, the incidence of land revenue in Tanjore district was 275 per cent of that in other districts. In the new settlement to be undertaken, the Government proposed to raise the assessment by another Rs. 12,00,000. The total assessment under the new settlement would be Rs. 67,00,000 so that the rate of taxation would come to about Rs. 6-12-0 per acre. This was gross injustice.<sup>62</sup>

The Government which argued that the price of the corn was



increasing refused to see that the wages of labour and other expenses involved in cultivation were also increasing. It went ahead with the resettlement operations in December 1923 not caring to investigate into the actual ability or otherwise of the ryots to pay the increased taxation. The basis for the increase of 25 per cent of the land *kist* was not properly worked out. The fact that the soil of the district was not virgin and that years of cultivation had reduced its fertility which no amount of artificial manuring could immediately improve, was lost sight of.

On 14 December 1923, a resolution was moved in the Legislative Council recommending the suspension of the enhanced rate of land revenue in Tanjore district from January 1924 until the principles of land revenue settlement were debated and embodied in legislation. The maximum point of production having been reached in the lands of this district, any further increase would be unjust. The ryot was already groaning under heavy hardships—fall in the price of paddy, scarcity of water supply in the *Cauveri* which he was bound to face when the *Kannambadi* Scheme was commissioned, the increased cost of the necessities of life, the payment of higher wages for cultivation, the increased cost of manuring and a host of other problems which tended to aggravate the ryot's indebtedness and misery. In the words of Natesa Mudaliar the Government "cannot with any amount of conscience dare to crush down the Tanjore landholders with any more increased taxation the summit of which has already been reached by the previous settlement. . . . Before anything is done on a permanent and legislative basis, to force upon the ryot's slender means an additional 25 per cent of land revenue is not only unfair and unjust but very cruel and oppressive". He also said that the Presidency's contribution to the Central Government being based upon its land revenue, any increase in it would result in the Presidency's getting no reduction in its contribution either in the immediate present or in the distant future.<sup>63</sup>

But there was a stout opposition to the motion from the ministerial side. A. Ramaswami Mudaliar who had only a day or two earlier voted in favour of a similar measure in regard to Bellary and Anantapur lashed out against this motion.<sup>64</sup> His arguments were far from convincing as he failed to appreciate the fundamental fact that the lot of the ordinary small holder, wherever he might be—Tanjore, Cuddapah or Godavari—was truly too hard to bear any increase in taxation. The motion was defeated by the same Council which wholeheartedly and unanimously passed the motion

for the postponement of resettlement in Bellary and Anantapur only the previous day—13 December 1923.<sup>65</sup>

Among the Justicites themselves there was a diversity of views on this question. *Justice*, the Ministerial organ observed:

“That long before the joint Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons sat to decide on this question and asked that this settlement principle should be given legislative form, the Decentralisation Commission which sat very much earlier had said: ‘We consider that the general principles of assessment such as, for instance, the proportion of the net profit of the land which the Government shall be entitled to take and the period of settlement shall be embodied in a piece of legislation instead of being left to executive order as is now the case outside Bombay’”.

When Arthur Knapp refused to allow either the *mirasdars* or the legislative Council to contest the new rates, the *mirasdars* threatened civil disobedience. In March 1924, a few days prior to the defeat of the Land Revenue Settlement Bill, a deputation of Tanjore *mirasdars* waited on the Governor. This meeting resulted in the passage of a G.O.\* according to which the prevailing rates would be frozen as the maximum and applied to the settlements then in operation in Tanjore and to the operations to be undertaken in Trichinopoly. They were told that after the passage of the Land Revenue Settlement Bill into Law, Tanjore and Bellary would be allowed to come retrospectively under the maximum fixed in the Bill. But the *Mirasdars* who were not satisfied with the G.O. intensified their No-Tax campaign.<sup>66</sup> The Government maintained that the new rates were not excessive and denounced the agitation as primarily political in nature. The suggestion of the Raja of Ramnad to re-examine the whole matter was not accepted by the Governor. He handled the situation ineptly, refusing to receive another deputation on behalf of the *mirasdars*. The reason adduced for the refusal was characteristic of Willingdon: he acted in the manner he did because the Legislative Council had refused to recommend the postponement of the resettlement; a constitutional Governor such as he could not but abide by the decision of the elected representatives of the people!<sup>67</sup>

#### *Government's subterfuge:*

The Government did not stop with this. It gagged the influential *Mirasdars* by obstructing their efforts to convene a conference.

\* G.O. No: 439 Rev. dated 17 March 1924.



Pantulu Iyer and Marudavanam Pillai, both members of the Council, were served with orders which forbade them from attending the conference at Mayuram on 30 March to consider the aforesaid G.O. The order was to be in effect for two months. When Satya-murti raised the issue in the Council, he was told by the Law Member that the order served being judicial in nature under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, the matter was *sub judice* and the Government had no power to intervene. All the same the conference took place and the *Mirasdars* resolved to withhold payment of the revenue instalment for April 1924.<sup>68</sup>

Willingdon was widely condemned for having failed to find a just and equitable solution for the Tanjore settlement. He was accused of converting it into “a festering wound into which the knife is being turned by the Tanjore revenue officials”.<sup>69</sup> The plight of the Tanjore *Mirasdars* was compared by the public to that of the ryots in Kaira five years earlier. Willingdon was held responsible for both crises—in Kaira as Governor of Bombay and in Tanjore as Governor of Madras. “He left Goschen as troublesome a legacy in Tanjore as he did to George Lloyd in Kaira”.<sup>70</sup>

It may be recalled here that the draft of the Madras Permanent Assessment Bill submitted by the 14 member Committee in September 1921 was not made public for about two years and a half thereafter. It was printed only in March 1924 by Arthur Knapp to be kept on the table of the Council in April when he moved his hastily drafted Madras Land Revenue Settlement Bill. The provisions of the first Bill were not reproduced in the second for the simple reason that the powers proposed to be conferred on the Legislative Council by the first Bill were not merely novel but revolutionary and unprecedented. The Government of Madras was against giving any power to the Legislative Council beyond what had been provided for in clauses 12, 23 and 29 of the new Bill which gave the legislature “full opportunities” to discuss a scheme or any rules which the Government proposed to make before the scheme was approved or rules issued.<sup>71</sup>

Knapp's Bill was opposed by many members who would accept nothing short of a permanent settlement. Astonishingly, even K. V. Reddy Naidu and A. Ramaswamy Mudaliar voted against the Bill. All the same, they knew that if they rejected the Bill *in toto* on its very first reading, the Government would have a happy time of it for it never actually wanted the Bill. Ramaswami Mudaliar blamed the Home Member for doing no justice either to himself or

to the Government he represented or his colleagues on the Treasury Bench in his speech supporting his measure.<sup>72</sup> M. Ruthnasami\* who also agreed that the Home Member would only be too glad if the Bill got rejected, adopted a different attitude. Since its defeat would mean the continuance of his bureaucratic methods by the Home Member in dealing with settlement proposals, he exhorted the House to accept the Bill as it was. For the Bill conceded the very important principle that settlement proposals had to be brought into the jurisdiction of the Legislative Council.<sup>73</sup> C. Ramalinga Reddy would gladly agree to the Bill provided the legislature had control over the rates of assessment—the point over which the Treasury Bench differed from the rest. The Bill was finally thrown out ignominiously by the Council which insisted on full control over resettlement.<sup>74</sup>

The defeat of the much talked of Land Revenue Settlement Bill coupled with the great difficulties the Government faced in disposing of the properties attached from earlier defaulters, encouraged the Tanjore *mirasdars* who resolved at their meeting at Mayuram to withhold payment of the *kist* for April. This had an impact on the Government which slightly relented. There was a Press *Communique* on 19 May 1924 limiting the maximum enhancement at resettlements to 18 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> per cent. But it made no difference where the ryots were concerned. For the department happily went about collecting the land revenue coercively at the enhanced rate ignoring the prescribed reduction. To add insult to injury, interest was collected at the rate of 6 per cent for the preceding *fasli* and, by way of justification, the authorities cited Section 7 of Act II of 1864 under which arrears bore interest from the date on which they fell due! On top of it all came the floods in July 1924 devastating vast areas in the district. During the floods and the consequent breaches just at the beginning of cultivation, there was no normal supply of water in the river that irrigated the deltaic portion of the district. An adjournment motion was tabled in the Council demanding a suspension of collection of revenue in the Tanjore district for at least two months and calling for a careful survey of the district for finding out what lands were really entitled to remission. The Revenue Member Marjoribanks would not budge. He maintained that there was no evidence of rigorous collection of revenue and that as per

\*Professor M. Ruthnasami was a Justice MLC who was elected President of the Council late in 1925.



the latest report of the Collector on the general state of the crops in the district, there was practically very little loss and in many cases there were exceptionally good *samba* crops. He, however, admitted that in the *Cauveri* and *Vennar* head channels there was partial failure and that at the tail end of the channel there was a total failure of crops. The motion for suspension of the revenue was carried.<sup>75</sup>

The recommendations of the Joint Parliamentary Committee that the principles of assessment should be more closely regulated by Statute were never given effect to. Not even modifications were introduced in the existing purely executive process. A Government which constantly flouted public opinion had no difficulty in inventing justifications for their unjust acts. The public was given to understand that the Legislative Council was to blame as it was against any legislation that did not confer on it the power to sanction or reject the rates of assessment proposed in each scheme of settlement or resettlement; and that the conferment of such authority was not covered by the recommendations of the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee. Governor Goschen went one better when he said that the ryot was not at all dissatisfied with the existing procedure “except that he would much rather not pay anything at all and would prefer to pay as little as possible”. He also blamed the politicians for rousing the ryots of Tanjore in 1922 and said that timely counter propaganda would bring back the ryot to his “customary commonsense” which would make the collection of revised assessment easy.<sup>76</sup>

This attitude of the Government provided an attractive field for anti-Government agitation. But the *mirasdars* of Tanjore did not resort to it. They were not in favour of launching a mass civil disobedience as suggested by the Congress. They also rejected the suggestion that the local *mirasdars*’ Association should merge with the Tanjore District Congress Committee. Obviously they were keen to avert any confrontation with the Government which they apprehended would lead to both confiscation of their valuable land and incarceration.

The whole episode was, however, a distinct gain to the Swarajists in the Council. They put the Congress in the forefront of the agitation against the prevalent system of land tenure and effectively silenced the complaints of the Justice Party that the Congress would serve only the interests of Brahmans. The Swarajists followed up their Tanjore campaign “with constitutional activity on behalf of

the other landholders and tenants elsewhere in the Madras Presidency, while by default the Justice Party, its voice muted by collaboration with the *Raj*, appeared far less active in the interests of the *mirasdars* and ryots".<sup>77</sup>

### *Demand for Indianisation of Services: Lee Commission*

Indianisation of the services was an indispensable step in the move towards self-government. True, India owed the "steel frame" of the services to the British administrative genius. But the Indians had served their apprenticeship under British officers and had gained adequate competence to run the services on their own even by the turn of the century. Perhaps the Indian officers would not have become aware of their own strength and competence if the European bureaucrats had not staged a series of White mutinies. Such White mutinies were a frequent occurrence in British India where any concession to the sons of the soil was frowned upon by the alien White minority. While the statesmen in England proclaimed that their ultimate goal *vis-a-vis* India was Indian self-government and conceded at different stages of colonial history that India was ready for varying degrees of self-government, the White mutineers persistently resisted the intake of Indians in the higher services. When such intake became a *fait accompli*, they sought to resist their being equated with Indians who had risen to the level of their own cadre. These White mutineers subtly and vehemently retarded the Indianisation of the services, an indispensable prelude to the grant of self-government in India because they had a vested interest in the perpetration of colonialism.

The White mutiny that took place in the wake of the introduction of Montford Reforms aimed at scrapping those reforms outright as they were intended to pave the way for gradual Indianisation of services. The historic declaration made by Montagu on 20 August 1917 on British policy in India had itself caused considerable disquiet among the European Service men as it assured the "increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration". They were much exasperated when it was recognised that Montagu's promise made in the Parliament was a binding commitment. The postulate of the Secretary of State that the control of the services was a cardinal principle in the Reforms and that the duty of the services was not to dictate but to be dictated to, not to lay down policy but "to carry out most efficiently the orders and wishes



of its political superiors",<sup>78</sup> completely unsettled them.

"Indianisation" connoted the admission of qualified Indian members of the Service into those branches of administration where they would be trained in the inner art of government and initiated into its secrets. It implied "an intelligent and consistent" replacement of Europeans by such trained Indians. Apart from providing full and adequate opportunities for the growth and employment of Indian administrative talent, Indianisation also aimed at preparing the people for the attainment of Responsible Government and effecting some reduction in public expenditure. In the past the Government "imported" officers from Great Britain for almost every service—from the Indian Police, the Indian Civil Service and other specialised services down to even officers like the Veterinary Assistant Superintendents.<sup>79</sup> The Government firmly believed that all superior offices should be held by Englishmen recruited from England even if equally qualified and efficient Indians were available for the posts. The reaction of the European Chief Secretary to the recommendation of V. Krishnaswamy Iyer in 1908 in favour of the appointment of an Indian as a Member of the Board of Revenue was typical. The Chief Secretary held that as per the existing rules all the posts of Members to the Board of Revenue were reserved for the ICS. No one "not belonging to that Service could be appointed to the Board except under a general rule prescribed by the Governor General-in-Council sanctioned by the Secretary of State for India in Council". He added that the Government felt that the need for asking for any such rule "has not at present arisen".<sup>80</sup>

But things had changed since then and there were qualified Indians available to fill all the appointments in India. The Indian officers would no longer accept the Europeans recruited to the Indian Civil Service and continue to remain in a state of tutelage under them. It was time the European members of the Indian Civil Service gracefully acknowledged the altered position. The Service was expected to recognise with becoming dignity that "the ward is approaching his majority; and the guardian should welcome his co-operation in the labours of administration".<sup>81</sup> Since the Anglo-Indian officials were reluctant to do so, the Indians felt it was their legitimate right to demand a reasonable voice in their own affairs. They were already much aggrieved at the very meagre number of Indians appointed to the Secretariats of the Governments of India and of Madras and the consequent denial of opportunities to ac-

quire Secretariat experience. How appallingly low their numbers had been even in the beginning of the second decade of the century is evident from the following figures:<sup>82</sup>

	Name of Post	Total	Indians	Percentage of Indians
Govt. of India	Secretaries (including Joint Secretaries)	13	1	8%
	Deputy Secretaries	13	3	23%
	Under Secretaries	5	1	20%
		31	5	16%
Govt. of Madras	Secretaries	8	1	12½%
	Deputy Secretaries	1	—	0
	Under Secretaries	7	6	86%
		16	7	44%

It could not be argued that Indians of suitable calibre and experience were not available. In Madras alone there were as many as 7 senior officers some of whom had put in more than 20 years experience and deserved to be members of the Executive Council.<sup>83</sup> But the Indians were not getting their due.

This being the real situation, the white opponents backed by the die-hard elements in India and England chose to interpret "Indianisation" as aiming at the wholesale elimination of the European element and its replacement by Indians. As a result, this concession was deliberately hedged in with many restrictions regarding qualifications to be possessed so that the existing character of the services was not "swamped" or law and order undermined by too rapid Indianisation.<sup>84</sup> Willingdon himself accepted the principle of Indianisation only grudgingly. Notwithstanding his tall talks about his Government which he often described as a "happy family", "harmonious menage" etc. he was cautious enough to ensure that the ministerial control over the services was reduced to a vanishing point.<sup>85</sup>



*A persistent evil:*

The clamour of the Whites against the introduction of the Reforms became vociferous as they considered it *infra-dig* to serve under Indian Ministers. The higher authorities both in India and England getting alarmed over this, appeased the services by enhancing their salaries and pensions considerably in 1920. Even V. S. Srinivasa Sastri who had the greatest admiration for the Indian Civil Service which had built up the administration in India on “firm, efficient and thorough lines” observed that “on purely economic considerations . . . if further recruitment in Britain is possible only on a greatly increased scale of salaries, allowances and emoluments—the representatives of the people in our Legislative Assembly will be compelled to recommend a cessation or at least a substantial abatement of such recruitment. No Commission, however authoritative, can reconcile us to increased impositions on account of the British Services”.<sup>86</sup>

Increased emoluments could silence the White officers only for the nonce. They clamoured again in 1922. This time the Government had not only to increase their pay and pensions and Travelling and overseas allowances but also to liberalise the leave rules. Not content with these decided improvements, the Council of the Association of European Government Servants in the Bombay Presidency sent a memorial in April 1923 to the Secretary of State for India suggesting the need for a revision of their conditions of Service. It recommended therein that the pay and service of Europeans should be wholly regulated by the Secretary of State and those for Indians, which should be entirely distinct, by the Indian Government.<sup>87</sup>

The Tory Ministry of England with Peel and Winterton at the India Office readily responded to the aforesaid Memorial by appointing a Royal Commission to further improve the conditions of the Services in India. This Commission on Superior Civil Services in India named after its chairman Lee came into being in 1924—three years after the implementation of the Reforms Act. Besides Lee, it had four members including Indians. It opened its proceedings at Delhi on 4 November 1923 and completed its labours on 27 March 1924. Its aim was fourfold: to make the services independent of the popular form of Government in India which will ensure their immunity from attacks in the Press and platform; to further improve their financial status through more liberal grants in their pay, pro-

motions and pensions; to set at rest the discontent in the Indian political circles by granting the Ministers complete control of services in the *Transferred* departments; and to accelerate the rate of Indianisation of the services. The Commission stated in its report: "In the minds of the services, the uncertainty of the political future of India, combined with attacks upon them in the Press and the platform, and their steadily deteriorating financial condition, produced feelings of anxiety and discontent. In Indian political circles, on the other hand, the new system seemed incomplete and slow in operation. It seemed incomplete because the self-government granted in the 'Transferred' field was limited by the fact that members of the All India Services engaged therein were still under the ultimate control of the Secretary of State. It seemed slow because the rate of Indianisation adopted since 1919 was regarded as illiberal".<sup>88</sup>

However, when the Lee Commission actually set about its work, it became evident that its main purpose was not so much to meet the Indian demands for greater participation in the services as to assure Europeans of a secure and remunerative career in the Indian services. Their contention was that Indian Political life had everything to gain from the advice and service of the best type of British recruits in whom the practice of British democracy was instinctive.

The Commission visited only six important centres and orally examined only 411 witnesses out of 1300 persons and associations who responded to their *questionnaire*. Even of the 411 witnesses only 152 were heard in public; the others shrank from recording openly "opinions which they conscientiously held but which, if published in the Press, might involve them in political controversy".<sup>89</sup> The Commission chose to characterise the evidence tendered publicly as being "one-sided". Its proceedings gave one the impression that the Chairman had mentally formed his own conclusions and merely wished to give them the backing of evidence. The Commission succeeded in setting afloat the rumour that the Indian officers were diffident of their own ability and efficiency.<sup>90</sup> It was not known on what basis the witnesses were selected to tender evidence on behalf of the Indian officers in the Provinces visited by the Commission prior to their arrival in Madras. But then there was the fact that, unlike the Europeans, the Indians had no organisation of their own. This enabled the Commission to make unmerited attacks upon the Indian talents in those Provinces. Their behaviour



annoyed the Indian Officers in the Madras Presidency so much that they were determined to show the Commission their place.

*Brave front:*

The Commission visited Madras in the first week of January 1924 and quite a sensation was created by the divergent evidences tendered. The European officers of the Madras Presidency made the eccentric plea that the standard of living in Asia was high and that "in his home the European will have from 3 servants or more in Japan, 5 or more in China, and not improbably 17 in India".<sup>91</sup> They also declared that the Reforms to which Willingdon gave effect both in letter and in spirit, had impaired their position not only in the *Transferred* but also in the *Reserved* departments. They blamed the Governor for having failed to protect them.

The Indian officers in the Presidency, on the other hand, stoutly denied this accusation holding that the Ministers had loyally supported the services whenever they were attacked in the Legislative Council and that no European had ever been deprived of his rights. The Commission had a tough time with them as they were determined to vindicate their rights. They would no longer accept any discrimination between an Indian and a European member of the services. Employment of Europeans of ordinary ability when there were abler Indians was sheer waste of Indian money. No recruitment from outside India was at all necessary for the general administration.

The Indian officers in the Presidency asserted that Provincial Civil Service was as good as the Indian Civil Service and that Madras was ripe for complete autonomy as there was no dearth of talented and experienced Indian officers who could run every civil department as well as any European. Annoyed by Lloyd George's description of the Indian Civil Service as the "Steel Frame" in the Parliament, they said that India could manufacture her own steel and obtain protection for it.<sup>92</sup> They called for provincialisation of all services and payment to Europeans the same scales of pay as they did for Indians, without overseas' or other allowances. On the question of reserving a certain number of seats for Europeans they stated emphatically: "We deny that from the stand-point of efficiency and character an essential European element is necessary in any of the civil services and we do not except from this category even the so-

called 'security services'. Knowing as we do the work of the European officer at close quarters and possessing thus exceptional opportunities for comparing his work with our own, it has been a matter of painful surprise to us that even in quarters where one should have expected better knowledge it should sometimes be taken for granted that we lack certain administrative qualities which the European is supposed to possess.

"We can understand the candid argument that India is politically subordinate to England and that therefore she must submit to a number of lucrative posts being reserved for Englishmen. But it is adding insult to injury if such reservation is accompanied by the assertion that Indians are unfit for such posts". The Indian Officers, however, made it clear that if the European came, they would not certainly shut him out but would not allow him to be anything more than their equal in every respect.

P. S. Sivaswamy Iyer made out a strong case against the increase of salaries to the European services while tendering evidence before the Lee Commission. He pointed out that the declarations of Parliament notwithstanding, a deep-rooted distrust of the *bona fides* of the British Government and of its unwillingness to grant Responsible Government to India was universally prevalent in India.<sup>93</sup> Such outspoken expression of facts was unpalatable to the Commission as they were different from what they heard and saw in other provinces. An irate Lee dubbed the memorandum as needlessly immoderate and even provocative. It must be noted that whatever the Indian members did was above board while a significant number of European officers refused to tender their evidence in public which was unfair to the former.

When the Commission failed to elicit the answer they required from the Indian Officers in the Presidency, they sought to wring it out of the Advocate General and President of the Bar Association, Madhavan Nair. He was subjected to lengthy examination during which an attempt was made to force him into an admission that the European element was indispensable as Europeans had no confidence in the sense of justice of an Indian officer. But Madhavan Nair refused to budge and denied that caste or religion could ever interfere with the officers' judicial work.

As seen earlier, the Indian Officers' Association in the Presidency plumped for complete provincialisation of the services as a prelude to provincial political autonomy. P. Rajagopala Achariar also ex-



pressed a similar view in a speech made at Tirukkalukundrum. But P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer, who gave a frank picture of the prevalent feeling among the Indian officers of the Presidency in his deposition before the Commission, chose to think otherwise. He submitted a Memorandum to Lee which was intended to be a necessary corrective to the rampant “extremist views” propounded by the Indian Officers’ Association in respect of provincialisation of the services.<sup>94</sup>

Surprisingly even the non-Brahman leaders who had already worked the diarchy for one full term and were consequently in a position to throw some light on the relations between the Reforms and the Services were treated by the Commission with “cold contempt”. A Ramaswami Mudaliar, a leading light of the Justice Party, was not even allowed to give evidence before the Commission. Equally bad was the treatment meted out to Justice T. Sadasiva Iyer. However, the Depressed classes of Madras were allowed to give evidence. They seized the opportunity to launch a strong attack on Brahmans and caste Hindus which amused the Commission. Two of their representatives, R. Srinivasan and M. C. Rajah, wanted a predominance of the European element in the services as they opined that the interest of their caste was safer in the hands of aliens than Indians.<sup>95</sup>

By the second week of January 1924 the Commission concluded its sittings in Madras. It submitted its report in August 1924. Indian politicians disdainfully dubbed it the “Blackmail Commission”.<sup>96</sup> It was clear from its Report that the Commission aimed at further enhancing the salaries and raising the prestige of the Europeans. Within four years of the Reforms, the superior services had three increments and within a decade, the percentage of increase in the pay of the Indian Civil Service was 19; in the case of the Forest Service it was 41; Police 71; and the Medical Service 20. Its recommendations only served to create feelings of jealousy and animosity between Indians and English in the services. In the case of the Indian Civil Service, the Commission recommended that a 50 per cent Indian membership should be reached by 1939 when a second Commission was expected to review the position. For the Indian Police Service, in view of its importance in upholding “law and order”, the Commission suggested that parity between Indians and Europeans should not be attained until ten years later, that is, till 1949. Indianisation of the Indian Police Service beyond the 50 per cent mark was not even discussed.

From the financial point of view, the Commission's recommendations to give more money to the Civil Services were absolutely unacceptable since India, the "poorest country in the world", had already the "costliest Civil Service in the world". The Lee Commission sought to saddle India with a fresh burden of Rs. 125 lakhs and *pro rata* on that of Madras. The province of Madras would thus be burdened with a recurring annual expenditure of Rs. 10 lakhs which might in course of time increase further.<sup>97</sup> Their idea was redressal of the grievances of the services most of which were not real. Even where the grievances were real, the country could ill-afford to redress them on the scale recommended by Lee and his colleagues. If the services adamantly demanded their pound of flesh, it was because they knew that in India "the services call the tune and the people pay the piper".<sup>98</sup> In making its recommendations, the Commission took into account neither the devolution of power following the 1919 Act nor the poverty of India which called for serious curtailment of expenditure on the part of the Government. It also blocked India's progress towards responsible government as the control of the services would continue to be in the hands of the Secretary of State. It contemplated the continuance of the accursed system of diarchy leaving no possibility even remotely for a transfer of all subjects, either provincial or central, to popular control.

Its financial implications apart, the report was bad also from the political and constitutional view-points. It had proceeded on the assumption that the European character of the administration would be perpetuated. This ran counter to the changing conception of the relationship between India and Britain. Touching upon the problem of recruitment of Civil Service, the British Premier Ramsay MacDonald said:

"I believe that the Imperial connection can be kept up by a self-governing India enjoying with the appropriate modification, Dominion privilege of Home Rule. Mere polished efficiency is not the end of our custodianship of India; a *Pax Britannica* is not the end; the end is Indian life abundant, responsible and spontaneous".<sup>99</sup>

The recommendations of the Lee Commission were thus a clear proof of the attempt to preserve the European hegemony in the services indefinitely.

#### *Recommendations rejected:*

The report of the Commission came up for discussion in the



Madras Legislative Council on 22 August 1924 when a resolution jettisoning its recommendations and demanding their non-implementation in the Province of Madras was moved. The motion had the support of many members. It was pointed out that even granting that further recruitment of Europeans was stopped forthwith, it would take a minimum of three decades before the services were completely Indianised. In such a circumstance, the Lee Commission report providing for an exceedingly slow pace of Indianisation of services had to be rejected.<sup>100</sup>

The Council also protested against the extraordinary provision in the Report that members of the Civil Service and their families must enjoy the privilege of being attended to by medical officers of their own race. The Commission had obviously forgotten that the services existed for India and not India for the services. That was the time when Indian doctors began to enjoy a large practice in England, Scotland and Wales among the “natives” of those countries. Besides, the most popular doctor with the Europeans in the whole of Madras was the renowned Dr. Rangachari, an Indian. The motive behind this provision about medical relief was clearly to perpetuate the Indian Medical Service which could not exist but for this “manufactured racial demand”. As the reputed Doctor U. Rama Rao observed: “The Indian Medical Service are responsible for the introduction of the ‘caste system’ in the Subordinate Medical Services, such as the LMP or Sub-Assistant Surgeon, the LMS, the MB and CM or now the MBBS, the Lady Assistant Surgeons and so on”. He also stated that the pay of the service should be reduced in 1924 as promised by the Secretary of State because the cost of living both in India and England had gone down at least by 20 per cent since 1920 when the last increase of pay was granted.<sup>101</sup>

The only commendable provision in the Report was the immediate appointment of the Public Service Commission as contemplated in section 96(c) of the Act of 1919. No doubt this also had a lacuna inasmuch as in the fixation of standards of qualifications and modes of examination popular legislators had no say. Still, the setting up of the Central Public Service Commission in 1926 for the all India and the higher services was a most welcome feature. The Commission refrained from recommending the extension of the Central Public Service Commission to the provincial services, perhaps knowing that it would be unacceptable to the Provinces. It recommended that the Provinces themselves should pass Public

Service Acts to regulate recruitment and reduce the risk of political interference in the process. The only Presidency which had legislated on this issue was Madras where a Public Service Commission Act framed on the lines of the Statutory rules for the Central Commission was passed in 1929.<sup>102</sup>

The motion on the Lee Commission report tabled in the Council was carried. The event was greeted with complete unanimity in the Council which pointed to the triumph of public opinion against the reactionary recommendations of the Lee Commission. It was passed by a substantial majority of 39 against 11. It was significant that not one among the 11 who voted against the motion was an elected Indian representative. No less significant was the fact that the Ministers and Council Secretaries refrained from voting on the motion. *The Hindu* observed: "It goes on without saying that those who are not with the bureaucracy are against it".<sup>103</sup>

The triumph of the resolution in the Council did not mean that Indians had their way. In 1930, the Simon Commission Report stated that "the six years that had elapsed since the Lee Commission reported had not lessened the need for the British element in the security services. Communal tension had increased and it had never been denied seriously that the impartiality of the British officer . . . gave him a special value in administration".<sup>104</sup>

### *The Irrigation Bill*

#### *Defeat:*

The defeat of the Irrigation Bill in the Madras Legislative Council in 1923 flung a great surprise on the public of the Presidency. It had begun to entertain misgivings about the genuineness of the paeons of praise often showered by Governor Willingdon on the successful functioning of diarchy in the Province. Willingdon often claimed that he was carrying on the administration not so much as a diarchy but as a collective Cabinet Government wherein the *Reserved* and the *Transferred* halves worked together like a "happy family". The Ministers and the ministerial Press also frequently reported that the *Reserved* and the *Transferred* halves in the Presidency "worked together, consulted together and had heart-to-heart talks together". It was a sad reflection that hard on the heels of such encomia on the working of diarchy in Madras,



should have occurred a misadventure over an important piece of legislation.<sup>105</sup>

The very first Irrigation Bill introduced in the Council by the Law Member K. Srinivasa Iyengar was defeated on 29 January 1923—with 19 voting for and 57 against it, 10 remaining neutral. This overwhelming majority which rejected the Bill consisted not only of the leader of the opposition and those who generally acted with him, but also of the non-official members representing the various committees and interests who sat in all parts of the Chamber.<sup>106</sup>

The Irrigation Bill was not a measure which had been sprung upon the Council all of a sudden. The passing of such a measure dealing with the rights of landlords and tenants in the matter of irrigation had for long been considered a most urgent necessity to promote the interests of the agricultural population of the Presidency. The measure had been on the anvil for about half a century then. Since the turn of the century all the proposals made in respect of irrigation by the Government of Madras were turned down by the Central Government as it could not authorise any construction until the irrigation law had been placed on a satisfactory footing. In 1905, when the Government of India was approached for the Cauveri project, it conveyed its firm opinion that legislation in Madras was necessary to secure to Government such power of control over waters stored for irrigation. In 1909, when the Government of India was approached again for the Tungabhadra project, it said, quoting from an earlier correspondence, that it would not recommend such a costly scheme until the necessary legislation had been enacted. Similar statements were made by the Government of India when the Madras Government approached it for financial assistance in 1912 and 1919. When C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer proceeded to Simla to obtain sanction for the large Mettur project, the same reply was given again.<sup>107</sup>

At long last in 1923 the much needed Irrigation Bill took shape. It demonstrated the most elementary right of the State to conserve its natural resources and to deploy them to the betterment of the poor, long suffering masses of the Presidency to whom water for irrigation meant freedom from hunger and starvation. Apart from the agricultural prospects of the ryots population the legislation was also in the interests of the huge projects which the Government had on hand to secure an increase in the food production of the country.

This Bill—the very first of its kind in the field of irrigation, was considered by the Governor-in-Executive Council and by the Governor-in-United Cabinet composed of the Executive Councillors and Ministers. It was examined and approved by the Government of India also. The same Bill was defeated when it was placed before the Legislative Council because the landed gentry was opposed to the measure which aimed at the well-being and prosperity of millions of people in the Presidency. And the Ministers who had always claimed to be laureates of the poor succumbed to the influence of a small but highly powerful section of the public.

This attitude of the landed gentry towards the toiling masses on whose labour they parasitically thrived was typical of the feudal social structure. The landed nobility could never tolerate a rise in the economic level of the masses. They were instinctively afraid that the prosperity of the masses would jeopardise their own superior position. The Ministers had not fully realised their responsibility as Ministers. Had they done so, they would have either suggested suitable amendments or convinced the *Reserved* half about the defects of the Bill. It was only at a much later stage when they had misgivings about getting a majority vote on its introduction in the Council, did the Ministers make their party's opposition to the Bill sufficiently clear. Thereafter the Governor took the full responsibility for going forward with the measure reposing as he did, his full confidence in the members of the Council. He himself admitted later: "I hoped and trusted that the honourable members would pass the Bill at this stage, amend it in Select Committee and refrain from taking the unusual course—in regard to an important Government measure—of throwing it out on introduction".<sup>108</sup>

The Ministerialists' attitude towards the Bill was condemned even in quarters deemed to be friendly to them. Blaming the Ministers for sacrificing the real interests of the masses to the clamour of a minority of the public, the *Madras Mail* wrote: "If the Bill received the blessing of the Ministers in secret Cabinet, what explanation can there be for the attitude of neutrality that they assumed in the open Council and the *non possumus* attitude adopted by the Ministers pointed to the fact that in rejecting the measure the present party in power was more influenced by extraneous considerations than by a due sense of regard for the interests of the people whom they loudly claim to represent".<sup>109</sup>

The *Transferred* half asserted that there was no constitutional crisis involved in the defeat of the Bill. They even alleged that they



had no responsibility over a legislation affecting the *Reserved* half. This was a wrong assumption as the Ministers had a greater responsibility than the *Reserved* half in matters of legislation. They were not merely “the Ministers of the Governor” but were “also pilots of the legislature” and as the ruling party they had a “heavy responsibility in respect of all legislation whether ‘reserved’ or ‘transferred’”.<sup>110</sup>

Willingdon skilfully wriggled himself out of the inconvenient situation caused by the fiasco of the Irrigation Bill. He restored the harmony of his “happy family” by making his Law Member the scape-goat. Instead of standing by him as per the highest British Parliamentary traditions, Willingdon conveniently threw the blame on the Law Member, K. Srinivasa Iyengar, the able but unfortunate Law Member, was obliged to resign on 7 February 1923. *The Hindu* which had often criticised the political outlook of K. Srinivasa Iyengar said on this occasion that the Governor got rid of an inconvenient colleague who was not exactly popular with the party in power by the simple method of throwing him to the wolves.<sup>111</sup> Commenting on the unfortunate incident, the same paper wrote again, while evaluating the administration of Willingdon on the eve of his departure: “It is an ill-wind that blows nobody any good. What looked like a betrayal of a colleague was soon hailed as establishing if not a full-blown convention at least a blushing precedent, the principle being that an Executive Councillor who has lost the confidence of the Council should resign”.<sup>112</sup>

A Governor, who was absolutely convinced of the necessity of a legislation to regulate the use of the waters of the Presidency for a variety of purposes had also the means of carrying it thorough. He could have taken recourse to his special power of certifying a measure after it had been thrown out by the Council although it was meant to be used only in extreme cases. Public opinion in the Presidency would have endorsed the Governor’s action. Willingdon’s explanation that he decided against certifying the Bill because he had always wanted to refrain from exercising such residuary powers in his relations with the Legislative Council amounted to hoodwinking the public.

### *Victory:*

C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, who had already earned the admiration of Willingdon over his performance as Advocate General<sup>113</sup> and

richly deserved a step-up in his position, was made the Law member on 12 February 1923. He introduced a fresh Bill on irrigation on 6 February 1924. Before doing so, he took every care to give all the interests concerned the fullest opportunity to give their views and opinions. Evenso, there was opposition to the Bill from some quarters. There were even motions recommending a postponement of its introduction as the provisions intended for the people must be made known to them.<sup>114</sup> It was generally understood that the Bill provided for: (1) control by the Government of some important irrigation works; (2) perpetration of the system of taxation by the Government with no effective control by the representatives of the people; (3) conferment of very extra-ordinary powers on the subordinate officers of Government; and (4) several other provisions injurious to the interests of the people. It was even dubbed as *C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer's Bill*.<sup>115</sup>

Undaunted, Ramaswamy Iyer carried the day by a brilliant speech in support of his Bill. He narrated most tellingly how agricultural Madras, dry in many places, was without adequate facilities for irrigation, while all other provinces had stolen a march over it in this regard. Practically, every province in India had an Irrigation Bill. He referred to the *Sukkur* project which had been sanctioned and the *Sutlej* project which had practically reached fruition. Then referring to *Sangameswaram* Scheme, he said the consent of the Nizam had to be obtained for it. Once it was secured and the Scheme executed, he argued, it would benefit a great part of Southern India. The project could be taken through one million acres of land especially in the arid and desolate areas of the Ceded Districts turning them into a veritable garden of vegetation. If the *Mettur* Scheme was put into operation, an extent of a quarter of a million acres of land then dry would become available for irrigation. There were hundreds of smaller schemes which could not be taken up by the Government for development for want of legislation on irrigation. Madras could never hope to obtain money from the Government of India unless she told the latter: "Your objections have been answered; your difficulties have been remedied; this Presidency is willing to place the irrigation law on a satisfactory basis". Ramaswamy Iyer pointed out most lucidly the two main disabilities that the Madras Government was labouring under for starting any major irrigation project. They were: want of financial aid and the need for the reservation of certain powers to the local government for the regulation of water in the land without which no progressive scheme was possible



in the Presidency. To keep the Ministry also in good humour he said that he was more fortunate than his predecessor, for he enjoyed the “support of the Ministers, not a blind and unquestioning support, not a mere adherence for adherence sake but I have their support for the general principles of the Bill. . . .”<sup>116</sup>

The Madras Irrigation Bill was submitted to a Select Committee of 35 members whose report was presented by Ramaswamy Iyer before the Council on 10 October 1924.<sup>117</sup> The Government of India also gave its sanction to the Bill as amended by the Select Committee. But discussions over the Bill in the Council dragged on for several days during October and November. Several dissenting minutes were recorded. Satyamurti moved for a recommittal of the Bill to the Select Committee but his motion was lost.<sup>118</sup> On the eve of the passage of the Bill Satyamurti raised three points—whether the Government, the Zamindars and the ryots got all they wanted out of the measure. But Satyamurti’s stand was objected to by many.<sup>119</sup>

Encomia were showered on Ramaswamy Iyer from all quarters for having successfully got through the Bill.\* One member said that it would be more appropriate to call him the “Irrigation” Member than Law Member.<sup>120</sup>

The Bill containing 101 clauses was passed into Law on 5 December 1924.<sup>121</sup> The Bill that was long overdue was at last placed on the statute book. The success of the measure was pre-eminently due to Ramaswamy Iyer’s endeavours—his sweet reasonableness and sportsmanlike attitude towards defeats.

## *Provincial Contribution to the centre*

### *Step-motherly treatment*

Willingdon’s description of Madras as the “Cindrella of India” was not totally incorrect. The Presidency had always remained the most heavily taxed of the provinces of India. The earliest memorial

\*P. Kesava Pillai was overjoyed with the *Tungabhadra* project which was made possible by this Bill. The main slogan of the people of Gooty had been, “Bless us with irrigation and avert famines.” Pillai said that Ramaswamy Iyer’s term as Executive Member should be signalled by more such achievements that would constitute a perennial source of life to the famine devastated areas. (Pillai to Ramaswamy Iyer, 19 July 1924, *Kesava Pillai Papers*).

to the Government of India touching on this very old and vexed question contained such references to Madras as: “the undue hardship to Madras”, “grave injustice to Madras” etc.\*<sup>122</sup>

The virtue of frugality which enabled the Presidency to show a surplus budget year after year despite inequality of treatment meted out to it, proved the bane of its economic life; for the Government of India exploited this very virtue, conveniently appropriating all the surplus for herself. As for grants received from the centre the vast Presidency of Madras hardly ever got her due share. For instance, for the nine years from 1911–12 to 1919–20, Madras with a population of 41 million and a half received a recurrent grant of only Rs.28.50 lakhs for education while Bengal with 45 million and a half secured Rs.41.81 lakhs and Bombay with 19 million and a half, Rs. 21.45 lakhs. The distribution of non-recurring grants was equally skewed.<sup>123</sup>

The Montagu-Chelmsford Report pointed out how seriously the existing financial arrangements operated “as an obstacle to

\* The Memorial was sent by the Madras Chamber of Commerce in 1897. Again in 1900, during Curzon’s visit to Madras, the MCC pointed out the gross injustice Madras was labouring under, in the matter of provincial contribution to the Centre. In 1901, there was a large public meeting convened in Madras by its Sheriff which discussed the issue and sent up to the Government of India, a strongly worded memorial. The Financial Imperial and Provincial Adjustments made subsequently by the Government of India achieved precious nothing as the principle of equality of treatment remained merely on paper. In 1901, it was found that the Presidency was facing bankruptcy owing to the Imperial Government’s taking an altogether disproportionate share of the Presidency’s revenue, a large portion of which went to Bengal. Amptill called it an illegal interference with the rights of his Government under the Provincial contract. (His letters to Hamilton, 17 Jan. & 7 Aug. 1901, *Hamilton Papers*). In 1904, the Decentralisation Committee recommended in its Report that the same share of the primary sources of revenue should be allotted to each province to ensure equality of treatment. But this was not put into practice in the settlements for 1904 and 1905. (*MLCP*, Vol. III (1921), pp. 1236 & 37). Under this settlement, while Bombay received one half of the income from Land Revenue, Stamps, Excise, Income Tax and Forests, Madras got one half of Stamps and only a fourth of the other four. This inequality was set right in 1908 and Madras received a half share of all the five heads enumerated. But she was not allowed to enjoy this privilege beyond 1911 when what was known as the Permanent Settlement came into operation. Later when the Government of India under Viceroy Hardinge opted to retain the distribution of its surplus revenues among the provinces, Madras received the whole of the revenue from Forests and Registration and half of the revenue from land, stamps and Income Tax like other Provinces. But the parity of treatment ended here. (G. Slater, *Southern India—Its Political and Economic Problems*, p. 283).



provincial enfranchisement” and recommended a wider degree of financial devolution. Accordingly, the Financial Relations Committee was appointed in 1920 with James Meston\* as Chairman. To this Committee was referred the revision of resources and duties. Based on the resultant recommendations of this Committee a scheme was evolved which, with the slight modifications made by the Joint Select Committee of Parliament, became known as the “Meston Award”. The financial bodies in Madras welcomed the Meston Committee since they thought that the constitution of this Committee would afford them the best opportunity to present their case once more. But the Committee’s Award came as the rudest shock to them.

No doubt, the Committee found in the contributions of the local governments neither uniformity nor any justification.<sup>124</sup> On a consideration of the fact that each province should be allowed a surplus after meeting their existing requirements from their existing revenues, they fixed the contributions for 1921–22 on the basis of former contributions. When it came to Madras Presidency the Committee conceded that the Presidency had been paying a higher contribution; nevertheless, it recommended an unjustifiable amount as a portion of its contribution.

The Meston Committee recommended the transfer of Land Revenue, Excise, Stamps (Judicial and Commercial) and Registration to the Provinces, together with any surplus of revenue accruing from irrigation works and forest administration. Out of these revenues the Provinces had to meet the cost of police and courts of justice, education, sanitary and scientific services, departments of agriculture, commerce, fisheries etc., and grants to local bodies which would be an incentive to improve their services. On the other hand, the Central Government was to retain the income from customs, income-tax, salt and opium (which were 3,190 lakhs, 2,219 lakhs, 1,096 lakhs and 353 lakhs of rupees respectively in 1920–21) and also the profits from railways (averaging approximately to 540 lakhs of rupees), post-office and currency for defraying the expenditure on defence, debt charges and all-India Services.

Under this financial arrangement it was calculated that the spending power of the provinces would increase by 1,850 lakhs of rupees and that the Central Government would be left with a deficit

\* Member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council who also acted as arbiter in settling the issue of communal representation.

of 983 lakhs. And this deficit would have to be met by contributions from the provinces. The provinces of Madras, the United Provinces, the Punjab and Burma which were left with surpluses were called upon to make initially the largest contributions. The Committee, however, proposed that the initial contributions should be gradually adjusted in such a way that ultimately all the provinces contributed in proportion to their ability.<sup>125</sup>

*The following Table shows the settlement proposed by the Meston Committee:*

Province	Lakhs of Rupees			Estimated Equitable Share of total Provincial contribution.
	Estimated increased spending power	Proposed Initial Contributions	Residual gain to Province	
Madras	576	348	228	17
United Provinces	397	240	157	18
Punjab	289	175	114	9
Burma	246	64	182	6½
Bombay	93	56	37	13
Bengal	104	63	41	19
Bihar and Orissa	51	nil	51	10
Central Provinces	52	22	30	5
Assam	42	27	27	2½

As shown above, the Presidency of Madras had to make the highest initial contribution. Her share to meet the deficit of 983 lakhs of rupees in Central revenues was 35½ per cent of the deficit and not 17 per cent which was her legitimate share and which would amount to only 167 lakhs of rupees.

#### *Rational reactions:*

In the wake of this most unpleasant announcement there was a mammoth public meeting in Madras held under the auspices of all



public bodies in the Presidency to protest against the award of Meston and to condemn the “prolongation of the admittedly inequitable policy followed in the past, of casting on the Madras Presidency the burden of relieving other and richer Presidencies, which burden has been consistently denounced by all shades of opinion in the Madras Presidency for many years past”. This public meeting urged the Government to recognise the fact that in view of past injustice, the Madras Presidency might reasonably claim favourable treatment and should be freed from any contribution whatsoever towards the Government of India. If, however, an imperial deficit had to be provided for temporarily, the meeting declared, that in no case should Madras be expected to find more than 17 per cent suggested in Meston Committee’s award and if any excess of that portion had to be paid, it should be treated as a loan to be repaid with interest.<sup>126</sup> This resolution was wired to the Viceroy and the Secretary of the State for India. But even such a strong, unanimous, carefully considered and reasoned opinion could not elicit anything beyond the usual polite acknowledgement from the Government of India. The huge contribution was forced on the Presidency notwithstanding its strongest protest.

Undaunted, Madras continued to cry hoarse against this undue burden both in the legislature and on public platforms. On this issue, the entire Presidency became a united family. Brahmans or non-Brahmans, Adi-Dravidas or caste Hindus, Moderates or Nationalists, all stood up for Madras. Even the Madras Government associated itself with the sentiments expressed by non-official members in the Council.

There was as much disquiet in Madras over the Financial Award of Meston as there was over his earlier Communal Award. The Government of Madras had to abjure the idea of making the Presidency a chief industrial province in India. They had to abandon at least for the time being their fond plans of developing the ports of Cochin, Tuticorin and Vizagapatam; improving the railways; and giving an impetus to the growth of cotton, oil seeds, sugar, tea, coffee and rubber of which the best varieties were grown in the Presidency.

The State Aid to Industries Bill had to remain an aspiration owing to paucity of funds. There were no funds to run an important mill established at Coimbatore. Agriculture made no headway for long because of lack of funds. The Government had to postpone many developmental projects in the Presidency. Added to these,

the Government had to meet the demands of the N.G.Os for better pay; and arrange for relief operations in the famine affected areas of Ganjam, Bellary and Kurnool. The Government was compelled to resort to retrenchment of staff and in this direction too the Presidency was far ahead of the other Provinces. The Council helped the Government in getting passed a series of fiscal measures which would augment the provincial revenue. They passed an amended Stamp Act and raised the Stamp duty by 50 per cent; passed the Court Fees Act and raised the Court Fees duties by 50 per cent. The Registration Fees were also raised.<sup>127</sup> It was particularly a great blow to the Ministers who were unable to start any developmental activities in the *Transferred* half under the Reforms Scheme.

#### *Madras Government Unhappy:*

The inability to balance its budget consequent upon the Meston Award, disheartened the Madras Government much although deficit finance was then a global malady. The figures compiled by the League of Nations of the Budgets for 1921 of its member countries showed that only 4 nations out of 26 for which they had statistics, had succeeded in making their revenues cover their expenditures. While proroguing the Council on 3 April 1923, Willingdon said that "but for the failure of another Government (Government of India) our Budget would have balanced with something to spare".<sup>128</sup> He also, as he often did, attributed the large deficit to some degree to the Non-co-operation Movement.

Willingdon wrote to Montagu to seek his help. But he was helpless and could see no way out. He expressed his inability to persuade the Government of India that Madras was the "shorn sheep" as it persisted in its belief that Madras was the "sheep to be shorn".<sup>129</sup>

On account of their commercial influence, Bengal and Bombay were given the highest priority in any financial arrangement. The "wealthiest" province of Bengal was exempted even from the initial contributions for three years although her share amounted to a paltry sum of 63 lakhs of rupees. Madras protested against this preferential treatment. A resolution was moved in October 1921 in the Legislative Council recommending a restructuring of the existing system of provincial contribution under which her share to the Central Government constituted more than one-third of the total contribution paid by all other Provinces.<sup>130</sup> But it did not achieve anything as technical objections were raised by the Govern-



ment of India. Subsequently, a deputation waited on the Viceroy only to be told that the issue would be settled at a conference of the Finance Members to be held soon. The conference took place but nothing came out of it.<sup>131</sup>

The piteous appeals of the elected representatives of the Presidency at the Central Assembly, particularly the pleas of men like T. Rangachari and M.K. Reddy, hardly moved the Government of India. It now appeared as if the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, the Government of India's despatch of 5 March 1919, and even the Meston Committee Award had accorded a better deal to the Provincial Government. For they admitted the injustice of asking so huge a contribution from Madras and even apologised for it. But the Finance Member Malcolm Hailey with his recalcitrant attitude proved a hard nut to crack. His defiant answers in justification of the continuance of the disparity of treatment was characteristic of the "steel frame . . . cold like steel, rigid and heartless". The reaction of the supreme spokesman of the Government of India to the second resolution of the Madras Council backed up by a written protest from about 75,000 tax-payers was one of undisguised unkindness. For he said: "Put not your trust in the Central Government; your only hope lies in placing your case before the British Parliament and before the Joint Parliamentary Committee".<sup>132</sup> When his attention was drawn to the special treatment extended to Bengal, he promptly said that it was so because the "immediate political reaction might extend far beyond the Province if the relief was not granted". Obviously, he was scared of the dire political consequences that might follow an adverse decision taken against Bengal.<sup>133</sup>

#### *Mudaliar's outburst:*

A resolution recommending financial relief to Madras was defeated in the Central Assembly when 38 voted for and 48 against it. The Finance Member also disallowed the circulation of the pamphlet *Milch Cow* which so cogently and so eloquently presented the case of Madras. These happenings in the Central Assembly had serious repercussions in the Madras Legislative Council. The members felt humiliated to find that five of the representatives of the Presidency at the Assembly had chosen to keep away from it when the fate of their own Presidency was discussed. One member cried angrily "Sack the lot". The reaction of A. Ramaswami

Mudaliar, of all the persons, astounded many in the Council. This staunch loyalist who had only a couple of days earlier denounced the non-co-operators in a most offensive language in the House, said now: "We, to our misfortune, have been a perfectly loyal lot. We did not boycott H.R.H. Prince of Wales when he graced this Presidency with his presence. We had no volunteers to obstruct business and create chaos in the Presidency. . . . We did not have all these things which the Haileys of Simla would recognise as showing our right for considerate treatment. We did nothing which would call the attention of the Finance Members of the Government of India to pay heed to our representations and to make them feel that unless the contribution from Madras was waived or reduced, that province would be in a state of revolt . . . the Haileys administering this continent from the heights of Simla can have no regard or respect for us. . . ." <sup>134</sup> Another Member P. Siva Rao said that if the India Government's intention was to reduce the Reforms in the Madras Presidency to a fiasco, they could not have done better than by insisting on this iniquitous impost. Mohammad Usman went to extremes when he exhorted the members to "non-co-operate" with the Government of India! The timely intervention of the Raja of Panagal appealing to the members to restrain their feelings fortunately saved the situation from further acrimony. <sup>135</sup>

It was not until 1925 that the Government of India thought of any remission of the Provincial share. In February 1925, announcing a surplus of Rs. 2,50,00,000 in the Assembly, the Finance Member proposed to devote it to a remission of provincial contributions. <sup>136</sup> Under the Devolution Rules, Madras was entitled to a remission of Rs. 1,26,00,000. But this announcement did not enthuse the members. Because no real benefit would accrue to the Presidency which would have to pay, even after the remission was made, a sum of Rs. 2,22,00,000 while Bombay and Bengal would escape with Rs. 56,00,000 and Rs. 65,00,000 respectively. <sup>137</sup>

Before the above proposal was carried into effect, the Legislative Assembly voted for the reduction of the salt tax from Rs. 1-4-0 to Re. 1-0-0. Though this was a welcome measure, it angered the official members of the Council. James Simpson brought in an adjournment motion which was carried. <sup>138</sup> But this was a most unfortunate motion as it was opposed to a reduction in the duty on salt which was a necessity of the people. It was unwise on the part of J. Simpson to combine this with provincial contribution. As a matter of fact, Basil Blackett, the Finance Member of the Govern-



ment of India, advised his Government not to reduce the provincial contribution because of the reduction of salt tax or of the abolition of the cotton excise duty. James Simpson conveniently omitted the latter because it was in the interests of Lancashire. He urged the Council to press its representatives in the Assembly to fight for the reduction of provincial contribution rather than of taxation.<sup>139</sup> While nobody would dispute the great need to do away with the provincial contribution, many were against linking this issue with reduction in taxation. Speaking against James Simpson's motion, Satyamurti blamed the Madras Government for its failure to bring about a reduction in the Madras contribution. If, even after five years of its existence, the Council had not succeeded in getting relief for Madras, it was because its protests had been ineffective. The Madras Government had proved "invertebrate" in this matter whereas in Bombay its Home Member Maurice Hayward, boldly declared that he would not proceed with a taxation measure, unless the Government of India came down and yielded to Bombay. Satyamurti regretted that it was the misfortune of Madras that it had no such man on the Treasury Bench.<sup>140</sup>

The Governments of Bombay and Calcutta minced no words in pointing out that the two great expanding revenues of customs and Income Tax having been taken by the Central Government, the latter could exact no provincial contribution. It was actually the clamour from Bombay and Calcutta and the pressure which those wealthy cities were able to put upon the House of Commons that led to the addition of the two following provisos: no contribution of any province should be increased; provinces should share to some degree in any future increase in the yield of the Income Tax.<sup>141</sup>

It would be interesting to know how the remission of Rs. 1,26,00,000 made for 1925–26 was apportioned by the Madras Government. A sum of Rs. 96.44 lakhs was set apart for meeting the deficit in the budget estimates for 1925–26; Rs. 2.19 lakhs to meet certain further demands which were postponed by the Council on 30 March 1925; and the balance of Rs. 27.37 lakhs was shown as surplus. Of this surplus a sum of Rs. 27.32 lakhs was distributed to the *Transferred* departments.<sup>142</sup> There were strong objections to setting aside Rs. 2.19 lakhs for such matters as constructing quarters for the new military Secretary to the Governor. The answers to the query as to what part of the deficit of Rs. 96.44 lakhs related to *Reserved* and what part to *Transferred* subjects, were evasive. When a member persisted in his demand for a statement,

the Finance Member T.E. Moir said that it would be a cumbersome task and that his department should be relieved of that burden.<sup>143</sup> There was therefore ground to believe that the major portion of this amount was spent in the *Reserved* departments in anticipation of the remission and very little on the *Transferred* ones which required substantial money for the nation building departments.

In the years following 1926, these contributions were reduced in successive stages until finally they disappeared from the budget in 1928–29. The widespread protests in the Madras Presidency against the patent iniquities in the incidence of the provincial contribution once again attest to an acute awareness of the economic implications of political decisions and dispensations on the part of its public. The public had to persist in their demand for more than three decades. Their demands which began in 1897 raged upto 1928 when an equitable arrangement was finally arrived at.

### *Participation in the Empire Exhibition*

Great Britain conceived the idea of holding a grand exhibition called the “British Empire Exhibition” in 1924. As the name implied, all her colonies were invited to participate in it. It was proposed to be organised on a scale different from any held till then. In the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 India had been accorded a proper place. But in the Paris Exhibition of 1900 and the subsequent Franco-British Exhibition held at the White City in London in 1908, India did not adequately participate. Owing to shortness of time the exhibits sent were very poor. Since the Empire Exhibition contemplated was a rare chance given to the Provinces, it was agreed that Madras should not let slip this unique opportunity which “should have a good commercial result as well as political effect in promoting a greater knowledge of Indian industries”.<sup>144</sup> Chadwick, the trade Commissioner in London, wrote that India’s participation in the Exhibition would afford her a great opportunity to express and demonstrate herself. All these goaded the Government of India into finally deciding to participate “adequately” in the British Empire Exhibition of 1924.

The Government of Madras also agreed to participate officially subject to the approval of its Legislative Council. When the Council met on 12 September 1922, K. V. Reddy Naidu moved a resolution urging necessary preparations and provision of funds to enable



the Madras Presidency to participate on an “adequate scale” in the Empire Exhibition and also to hold a preliminary provincial exhibition in Madras in 1923. The supporters of the resolution contended that although Madras was not a great industrial province, she could boast of a large variety of finished articles like the hand-woven sarees, the fine cotton cloths of Pullampet, jute bags from Chittivalsa, coir rope, matting and also painting products.<sup>145</sup> But the fundamental questions were whether the people wanted the participation of Madras and how much India gained by her participation in the previous exhibitions.

The Exhibition contemplated was a costly one which threatened to be a serious drain not only on the country's finances but also on her essential resources. Many were dismayed at the “super-imperialist” attitude which a patriot of C. Vijayaraghavachari's calibre assumed in this respect. He said that the British Empire Exhibition without India's participation would be like playing Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark, a statement which *The Hindu* characterised as “a pardonable extravaganza”.<sup>146</sup> But his argument that India's abstention from it would amount to a pennywise and pound foolish policy was unacceptable as India's participation would cost her immensely. He also ignored the trend of British fiscal legislation and policy and their scramble for special treatment in regard to markets.

K. V. Reddy Naidu's motion for the Presidency's participation was carried. In voting it, the Madras Government committed a serious blunder. The Government of India offered the Madras Presidency an area of 6150 square feet although they had asked for an area of 12,500 sq. feet. Britain gave a total space of 1,00,000 sq. feet free of cost to the Government of India on which the latter planned to construct buildings at its own cost and to rent them to the provinces. The Madras Government which was reeling under the strain of the huge provincial contribution to the Centre\* did not have a moment's hesitation in voting to participate in the British Empire Exhibition incurring enormous expenditure.

Fifteen months later, in the second Council under Montford Reforms, Satyamurti brought a motion recommending strongly the withdrawal of the Government of India from the proposed exhibition. His speech, one of the best ever made in the Council, gave the clearest expression to India's sense of indignation at the

\**Supra*, pp. 403–12.

most humiliating treatment meted out to Indians who were identified as a coolie race in practically every part of the British Empire. The supporters of the motion gave expression to the universal sense of resentment, sorrow and humiliation that had been caused in India by the British decision in respect of Indians in Kenya. As Churchill himself had said, the minority white settlers in Kenya had embarked on a policy of "deliberately squeezing the native of India from regions in which he had established himself under every security of public faith". The British who practised untouchability of the British version excluded from the high lands the Indian population. All the posts in the Kenya Government were reserved for Europeans. To the white settlers any proposal of political equality with the Asiatic community was preposterous. The settlement was in effect a "grand national humiliation". India's participation in the Exhibition after all the indignities heaped on her, would be like the Roman Triumph at which the Roman Emperors drove through the streets of Rome, with slaves tied to their chariot wheels.<sup>147</sup>

Since the ministerial portfolio dealing with the subject of the British Empire was just then held by T.S. Sivagnanam Pillai who replaced K.V. Reddy Naidu many entertained the hope that the former would consider the whole question afresh. Besides, the ministerial organ *Justice* itself justified the boycott of the British Exhibition and of British goods when it wrote that "the racial and political implications underlying the Kenya decisions are so revolting to our sense of national self-respect and honour that some of us are even prepared to undergo all the sacrifices involved if only we could thereby convey to the British public even a faint impression of the great indignation felt by one and all of us".<sup>148</sup> While India's non-participation would not diminish the grandeur of the Exhibition, it would definitely show the world how deeply India resented the treatment meted out to Indians in the British Empire.

The Council debated the question for three days and there was a strong desire to treat the issue above all political considerations. But an amendment moved by O. Thanikachalam Chetty to omit the words "withdraw from any participation in" and to substitute the words "incur no further liability in connection with" practically torpedoed the original resolution. The amendment was carried and finally when the modified motion was put to vote 40 voted for and 7 against it, 53 remaining neutral.



In such a crucial matter of national honour and dignity, the Council had “stuck to their old antediluvian opinions and did not give their honest vote”.<sup>149</sup>

This is a case of the retrograde elected representatives betraying the strong nationalist pride of their people. One must concede that such betrayals made the Presidency liable to be dubbed “unpatriotic”.

### *Neill Statue — An Insolent Reminder:*

The Ministry headed by P. Subbaroyan (1926–30) betrayed its total lack of national self-respect when the following three issues were debated in the Council—removal of Neill statue, seizure of Bharati's National songs and boycott of Simon Commission.

Having regard to the cruel, ignominious and notorious part played by Neill in the history of India, a resolution was tabled in the Council on 21 October 1927 recommending the removal of his statue in Mount Road, Madras. The motion aimed not at the destruction of the statue but merely at its removal from its existing situation in the heart of the city. Apart from offending the feelings of nationalist minded Indians, it also caused obstruction to the ever increasing traffic on the road. The motion was, as the mover himself said, the first of its kind to be moved “in any legislative body of this land”.<sup>150</sup>

Contrary to the truth, the inscription on the front side of the pedestal of the big bronze statue described Neill as:

“A brave, resolute, self-restraint soldier universally acknowledged as the first who stemmed the torrent of rebellions in Bengal. He fell gloriously at the relief of Lucknow 25th September 1857 Aged 47”.

The inscription at the back read: “Erected by public subscriptions, 1860”. These were untruthful statements tending to make “false history”.<sup>151</sup>

*verdict:*

The whole question at issue was whether Neill, who distinguished himself for his ruthless and dastradly acts in India, deserved a statue in the country. The motion condemned the methods of terrorism sought to be perpetuated by men like Neill and General Dyer “his apostolic successor”. Neill came to India as an ordinary

soldier and rose to the position of a colonel by dint of his military prowess. He was thrown into limelight at the time of the great Indian “Mutiny” of 1857. A monster in human form, Neill’s heart-rending atrocities and outrages during the 1857 Mutiny were a disgrace to all humanity, be they British or Indian. He burnt alive old men, middle-aged men, children, infants, babies in cradles and babies suckling at the breasts of their mothers. He twisted men to “forms of eight before they were hanged”. He marched from Allahabad to Cawnpore hanging people all along the hundred mile route “till hardly a free tree remained by the roadside, which had not been converted into a gibbet”.<sup>152</sup> Certain guilty villages were marked out by him for total destruction with all their inhabitants. J.E. Kaye who was not an Indian wrote: “There is no doubt that people were put to death in the most reckless manner. And, afterwards, Neill did things almost more than the massacre, putting to death with deliberate torture, in a way that has never been proved against the natives”. Another English historian, says that he could never forgive Neill for his bloody work. In fine, Neill was guilty of crimes against humanity committed “not in the course of war, but after the mutiny has been put down, as a deliberate act of vandalism and terrorism”.<sup>153</sup>

In September 1927, members of the Tamil Nad Volunteer Corps organised a satyagraha—of course with Gandhiji’s blessings—for the removal of the statue raised in memory of a hangman. It was originally installed more out of fear than out of any regard for him. The idea of attacking the statue was conceived by two persons—Somayajulu and Srinivasavaradan and the volunteers were led by one Kulandai.<sup>154</sup> Seeing the statue, one of these remembered what he had read in history about Neill and attempted to destroy it in September 1927.

Gandhiji’s support to this agitation was criticised by many. Some of his friends remonstrated with him as their agitation would beget hatred against the British—the very thing that Bapu, a believer in non-violence, wanted to eschew. Gandhiji who agreed with this view explained that non-violence was made of sterner stuff and that a “reformer seeking to spread non-violence must take note of the fact and guard against hatred, but dare not on any account hush causes of hatred. . . .”<sup>155</sup>

To the Satyagrahis, however, Gandhiji made it absolutely clear—as he did in the case of the people of Chirala-Perala during the Non-co-operation Movement—that they had to be self-sup-



porting as the Congress would not shoulder their agitation. The organisation could not take on itself a movement initiated by others however well and ably it might be conceived and conducted. While the Congress could take the credit if the agitation succeeded, it could never share the discredit for any failure.<sup>156</sup> Gandhiji advised them to suspend the satyagraha for three months but they were not for it. All the same they were worried about the consequences of their act if the Government knew it had not the backing of the Congress. Ultimately, however, they took the plunge and it was agreed that a continuous stream of volunteers would carry on the Satyagraha until the statue was removed. The volunteers were regularly sending papers to Gandhiji keeping him informed of the progress. And the Mahatma promptly gave them his advice whenever it was necessary. For instance, he objected to the line "Not only Neill but all of his nefarious breed must go" in their appeal which he felt jarred its tone. He emphasised that they were seeking to destroy the principle for which the statue stood. "We wish to injure no man. And we wish to gain our object by enlisting public opinion in our favour by self-suffering. Here there is no room for the language of anger and hate".<sup>157</sup>

It was while the Satyagraha was on that the resolution against the removal of the statue was moved in the Legislative Council. People supporting the motion said it would be sheer cruelty to allow the statue to remain there even after the House had learnt from authentic sources of the most wicked deeds of Neill. If the Government considered the monument indispensable, it could be installed "in his own birthplace and in his own native land". Pleading for its instant removal, Satyamurti said in his most memorable speech that Neill would ever remain an embodiment of abominable cruelty in the memory of the patriotic Indian. His own contemporaries had denounced his actions as most unworthy of the British race. Profusely giving extracts from great authorities to strengthen his arguments, Satyamurti said that the resolution was certainly a challenge to the British Government whose Viceroys and Governors called for hearty co-operation from the Indians. He boldly asked the British members in the House how would they themselves feel if a monument were raised in Britain for the Ex-Kaiser? He added that if a large party in the House of Commons like the Congress in India moved for the removal of such a monument "No British Sovereign would have a six hours' lease of life if it ventures to oppose it as this Government is doing". He requested the legisla-

tors who had the nerve to oppose the resolution to read Neill's misdeeds first and then go along the Mount Road to have a look at his statue.<sup>158</sup>

There was a historical precedence to the removal of a statue of this kind in response to pressure from the public. The statue of Cornwallis erected at a public place opposite the Collector's office in Madras was removed when the Muslim population of Madras raised a loud outcry against it. There was on its pedestal a bas-relief of Tipu Sultan in a humble posture handing over his two sons as hostages to Cornwallis, pending payment of a huge war indemnity of three crores of rupees. The local Muslims strongly objected to the portrayal of Tipu in a humiliating form and the Government of the day had to remove it forthwith to the Museum. The Neill statue, it was demanded, could also likewise be shifted to the armoury of the Museum.

*Improper decision:*

The innocuous resolution recommending the removal of the offending statue which was an emblem of Indian slavery was lost by an overwhelming majority—with 29 voting for and 67 against it, 2 remaining neutral.<sup>159</sup> Though the Justice Party abstained from participating in the debate, its members voted solidly against the motion. The fate of the motion was sealed in the shocking context of most of the Indian members of the House voting against it. Goschen predicted that the resolution would be defeated although he was not very sure of how the Justicites would act. In Goschen's view, Neill protected the Hindus from the enraged Muslims in 1857. "The Hindus", wrote he, "do not realise that had it not been for Neill and his men, there probably would not have been a Hindu party at all".<sup>160</sup>

After the defeat of the motion in the Madras legislature, Gandhiji wanted the youth of Madras to redouble their effort. He also advised those members of the Council who supported the resolution to help the Satyagrahis in every way.<sup>161</sup> The Satyagraha was carried on for six weeks with 30 youths courting arrest which included 1 Muslim, 1 lady and 1 girl aged nine. Of these, two weak-minded volunteers apologised to the authorities and got themselves released.<sup>162</sup> Those captured were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

A public meeting was held at Madras on 18 November 1927 at



which the speakers stressed with “unanswerable force” the case for the immediate removal of the Neill statue from its prominent position in Mount Road and its consignment to “merciful oblivion”.<sup>163</sup> Instead of gracefully acceding to the public demand, the Government chose to make a great fuss about what they called “disturbance” at the Neill statue and the subsequent events including the debate in the Council. Goschen attributed everything to the speech made by Gandhiji in September 1927 at Madras. Gandhiji said, among other things, that for the statue to be allowed to stand where it then stood was a standing insult to the Indian nation.<sup>164</sup> Governor ignored the protests of outraged national feeling when he reported that, but for this speech of Gandhiji, the whole affair would have fizzled out after a few more volunteers had been imprisoned.<sup>165</sup>

Every patriotic Indian conscious of the greatness of his motherland and the cruel wrongs she had suffered at the hands of such a tyrant felt unutterably humiliated at the behaviour of the Indian members who opposed the motion. The supporters of the motion grieved about the misfortune of India where her own sons holding positions of authority were content to look complacently at the whole affair. It is painful to learn that elected members who were at the legislature as representatives of the people had unabashedly toed the line of a Government which least cared for public feeling. The most tragic part of it was that it became almost an article of faith with these pro-British men to approve the acts of the Government at all costs and disapprove all measures that the Government would not approve. This most disgraceful gesture on the part of their Indian brethren who were not blessed with an iota of patriotism, must have offended the Nationalists more than the hectoring pose of the figure of Neill. It justified Gandhiji’s words that *Swaraj* was “delayed not so much by the obstinacy of the English ‘rulers’ as by our own refusal to recognise and work for our status”.<sup>166</sup>

The agitation for the removal of the Neill statue was a sign of the surging tide of nationalism among the public in the Presidency. Though it was spontaneous, it was powerful. It lasted through a decade attesting to deep and irresistible undercurrent of nationalism that was flowing in the heart of the common man in the Presidency.

Though the statue was not removed at that time, Nationalists like Satyamurti were sanguine that the agitation for its removal was bound to succeed and that it would not cease until it was removed. They proved right, for exactly ten years later, on 19 Novem-

ber 1937, the statue of Neill was removed to the Museum by the first Congress Ministry headed by Rajaji.<sup>167</sup>

### *Seizure of Bharati's Songs:*

The origin of this unpleasant episode was a notification put up by the Burma Government. It was to the effect that all copies of the booklet in Tamil titled "National Songs—Parts I and II" composed by the poet Subrahmanya Bharati, wherever found, should be forfeited to His Majesty as they contained seditious matter "tending to excite disaffection towards the Government established by law in British India".<sup>168</sup> Obeying implicitly the dictates of a far flung Government, the Madras administration not only published the notification but permitted action in pursuance thereof. The police seized 2000 copies of Subrahmanya Bharati's Songs from the Hindi Prachar Sabha in October 1928. By this act the Madras Government exhibited an abominable lack of discretion and judgment. There was no rule requiring the republication of notifications of local Governments in the Fort Saint George Gazette. Only the notifications of the Government of India published in the Gazette of India were republished in the Fort Saint George Gazette for the information and guidance of the people of Madras. The action of the Madras Government was therefore a deviation from routine practice.

An adjournment motion was tabled in the Council by Satyamurti on 9 October to censure the action of the Madras Government in publishing the notification and directing the city police to seize the booklets.<sup>169</sup> It was only a couple of months prior to the incident that the Chief Minister had announced that his Government would have no objection to the teaching and singing of Bharati's songs in Government and aided schools in the Presidency. Referring to this Satyamurti said sardonically that while the Chief Minister might make and unmake Ministers, he was powerless to influence his own colleagues in the *Reserved* half. For the Law and Home Members cared not for him but "listened to the Burma police directing the Madras Police to seize by warrant and forfeit to His Majesty those very books which the Chief Minister thinks furnish the intellectual pabulum to our young children".<sup>170</sup> By this shrewd reference Satyamurti pointed to the anomalies and absurdities of the diarchical form of government.

It was the great misfortune of Bharati that he was born in



British India. The poet who was a national asset, was obliged by enslaved India to sacrifice his everything at the altar of his motherland, live the best part of an all too short life as an exile in the French territory of Pondicherry; and die a broken man, survived by a widow and two daughters. It was most uncharitable, other things apart, for the Madras Government to deprive a widow and two fatherless daughters of their only means of livelihood, in their zeal to pursue the Burma Government's venal vendetta against such patriotic literature.<sup>171</sup> The two members of the Executive Council had deliberately become a party to a wicked attempt at "poisoning the intellect of the nation at its very fountain source". The Law Member was an erudite scholar in Malayalam literature and the Home Member in Islamic literature and culture and yet their behaviour in killing the patriotic spirit of the people was totally antagonistic with either of these two cultures.<sup>172</sup>

In his powerful patriotic speech Satyamurti said that notwithstanding the Government's action, Bharati's songs would remain a priceless heritage so long as the Tamil language lived even as the sacred *Vedas* had been transmitted from generation to generation "for aeons without a single piece of writing, by memory of our ancient Hindu ancestors". The songs of this author of Tamil Renaissance offered salutations to Mother India and dealt with her glory, her natural beauties, her heroes and heroines, her great achievements, her oneness and expressed hope in her future. They were so innocuous in nature that it revolted against the conscience of any person who had a spark of patriotism in him to find them wantonly characterised as seditious in nature and proscribed. Reading out a few songs from the first part of the "National Songs" Satyamurti asked the Chief Minister, himself a good student of Tamil, if he did not feel his "pulse beat quicker, his blood run warmer in his veins, when these magnificent, soul-stirring songs are sung".<sup>173</sup> He also pointed out that Bharati's poems offered an illustration of the basic difference between the nationalistic literature of India which believed in catholicity of outlook and co-existence of all cultures and that of England which believed in perpetual strife and conflict between warring groups. Whereas the motto of India was "लोकाः समस्ता सुखिनो भवन्तु", "Let India be free and happy and other nations of the world be free and happy", the British sang "God save the king, send victories, happy and glorious, and confound his enemies". He also stated that as a measure to counteract the action of the Government in laying its profane

hands on the sacred songs of Bharati, he had started propaganda for memorising every song of this immortal national poet. For, human ingenuity was yet to invent a machine to confiscate memories and thoughts.<sup>174</sup>

The adjournment motion was carried by a thumping majority of 76 against 12, 15 abstaining. It was a timely rebuff to the incompetent Madras Government which had failed to discharge its “elementary duty of safe-guarding and protecting its own policy against the imposition of repressive mandates and notifications by the most junior provincial Government in India”.<sup>175</sup>

The victory achieved on the motion bore eloquent testimony to the profound feelings of patriotism that Bharati’s patriotic poems had stirred in the Tamil world. The motion and the debate on it not only established Bharati’s as the authentic voice of the Nationalist Movement and of the national resurgence but also succeeded “in getting the so-called seditious poems enshrined in parliamentary proceedings for all time”.<sup>176</sup>

### *Boycotting the Simon Commission:*

It may be remembered that under Section 84-A of the Government of India Act of 1919, a Royal Commission was to be appointed to visit India to make an on the spot appraisal of India’s fitness for future reforms. The visit was to be made only ten years after the Act came into operation but the Home Government proposed to advance it. The Conservative Cabinet in Britain was bent on precipitating the appointment of the Indian Statutory Commission on Reforms in 1928—two years before the expiry of the statutory period of ten years of the working of the Reforms. Committed to preserving British Imperialism, the Government could not leave the matter until the next General Election of 1929. The Socialists of Britain who were diffident of their ability to fulfil their oft-repeated pledges to India were only too happy to render every possible help to the Conservative Government in the appointment of the Commission. They even gave two of their own men to serve on the Commission.<sup>177</sup> Birkenhead, the Secretary of State, who appointed the Commission was also happy about the time chosen for its visit as India was badly disunited then with communal riots provoked either by cowslaughter or by playing music before mosques. It would make it easier for them to get some loyal elements to tender evidence before the Commission to the effect that India was disunited and so was unfit for self-government.



On 8 November 1927, Viceroy Irwin announced that the all-British Statutory Commission would visit India early in 1928 for a preliminary enquiry. The announcement was made after Irwin had met the Indian leaders including Gandhiji. It was resisted by India and welcomed by Anglo-India. There was an uproar from the political parties, the press and the public. There was a strong objection to the very idea of sending a Commission.<sup>178</sup> There was a much stronger objection to the exclusion of Indians from it which offended the strong sense of national self-respect prevailing in India. Until the announcement was made, it was believed that the Commission would be of mixed composition. But it was not so because the British continued to believe that a sufficient number of competent and impartial Indians could not be found to serve on a mixed Commission. The Royal Commission was therefore an all-British one consisting of seven members of the Parliament under the Chairmanship of John Simon. The visit of such a Commission was naturally looked upon as a symbol of arrogant British imperialism which rode rough shod over Indian sentiment. The Commission paid two visits to India: the first lasting from 3 February to 31 March 1928 and the second from 11 October 1928 to 13 April 1929.

All parties were agreed that there could be no grosser insult to India than the visit of this Commission, to study and submit a report on the fitness of India to rule her destiny. The Congress gave a mandate to all patriotic and self-respecting Indians genuinely concerned with the political future of India to boycott the Commission. The call for boycott went round and political leaders of all shades including Justicites rushed headlong into one camp, and ere long every responsible leader had committed himself to "an adamant opposition to the Commission and a complete boycott of all its proceedings".<sup>179</sup>

The Congress leaders carried on the *hartal* propaganda day and night for several weeks throughout the Presidency. They appealed to all the citizens of Madras to support and take part in the peaceful boycott of the Commission. The Moderates and Liberals were particularly offended as the Parliament had excluded them disregarding their tried policy of co-operation with and confidence in the Government. The most eminent among them said: "We feel like Cardinal Wolsey".<sup>180</sup> The bitterness of the Moderates shocked Irwin.<sup>181</sup> Besant made a passionate appeal which *The Hindu* published prominently: "Awake, arise, men and women of every caste, class, community! Your mother's voice calls you to make her mis-

treass of her own household. Do not desert her in her hour of need. Boycott the Simon Commission''. Immediately after the announcement of the Commission's visit, the Congress Session at Madras held in December 1927 passed a resolution, moved by its President Jawaharlal Nehru, declaring independence as the goal of India. This united protest of Indian opinion must have caused great discomfiture to the authorities and particularly to Birkenhead who was making insolent speeches and unworthy references to dissensions in India.\*<sup>182</sup>

On 23 January 1928, the Madras Legislative Council debated the resolution which disapproved of the appointment of the Statutory Commission headed by John Simon and recommended "the institution of a representative Round Table Conference composed of delegates of the elected members of all Legislatures in India".<sup>183</sup> In the debate that followed, there were references to the helpless position in which the Labour party found itself in England. It was pointed out how a resolution sponsored by Olivier recommending joint meetings of the Simon Commission and of the Joint Select Committee of the elected and nominated official members of the Indian legislatures was mercilessly turned down by Reading, the former Viceroy, as impracticable. Birkenhead who intervened in the debate said nothing in answer to Olivier's proposals. Nor did Olivier have the courage to enforce his proposals. It was evident from Reading's ruling that the Legislature Committee would not be allowed to report. Since its functions had not been defined unambiguously, it would have no effective voice in shaping the decisions of the Statutory Commission. The only course open to India in the existing situation was to tell the British Government in India that the Commission was not acceptable to her and that a Round Table Conference must be convened to settle India's future.

In his speech full of biting satire delivered at the Council, Satyamurti replied to Birkenhead's assertion that the Indians would not dare to boycott the Commission: "We will dare. We have no enemies in the world. England has no friends. Go to France, go to Germany, Afghanistan, China; go anywhere, the name of your country stinks in the nostrils of the people of the world. Yet you are the people to

\*The famous Nehru Report (1928) prepared by the Committee headed by Motilal Nehru was the reply to the "arrogant challenge" of Birkenhead inviting critics in India to produce a constitution which might gain the assent of all interests in India. It proposed Dominion Status as the basis of the Indian constitution.



fight us”.\* He made a fervent appeal to the House to fall in line with the decision of the Indian National Congress, the All India Muslim League, the All India Liberal Federation, the All India Trade Union Congress and the Central Provinces Legislative Council and vote for the motion.<sup>184</sup> The motion was carried with 61 voting for and 29 against, 12 remaining neutral. The colleagues of the Chief Minister who had openly dissented from him on this fundamental issue, remained neutral perhaps out of deference to the official positions they continued to occupy. The result of the motion was announced amidst cries of *Vande Mataram* by the Swarajists. The Council's vote was one over which every patriotic Indian had every reason to rejoice. It was plain that, apart from the Congress and Liberal parties, the bulk of the elected members was also of one mind in regard to the boycott itself “whatever the process of reasoning by which they chose to arrive at the conclusion”.<sup>185</sup>

#### *Diarchy in doldrums:*

The Council's decision to boycott the Commission was welcomed by the public with unfeigned “relief and pleasure”. It showed the determination of the people of the Presidency, conveyed through their elected representatives in the Legislature that Madras was as much opposed to the Statutory Commission as any other part of India. *The Hindu*, however, had misgivings about the Council's decision. As if anticipating a deviation from the Council's vote, the paper observed that if Goschen refused to accept the Council's verdict as conclusive, the only course left for those favouring boycott would be to go ahead with the implementation of the Council's decision to boycott the Commission.<sup>186</sup> The paper was justified in its apprehension. The Governor demanded the Ministry to co-operate with the Commission setting aside the Council's decision against co-operation. He reminded them that they were appointed by him and held office at his pleasure. The First Minister submitted to this threat in utter disregard of the Council's mandate, but not so the other two Ministers. They were made to resign on 13 March 1928. It was high-handed and unjust—for co-operation or otherwise with the Statutory Commission was an issue which did not concern the departments entrusted to them. In the Central Pro-

\* At this juncture, loud cheers emanated from the visitors' gallery and the President asked the occupants to retire. As none obliged, he ordered the entire gallery to be cleared off.

vines, for instance, both the Ministers announced their determination not to have anything to do with the Simon Commission and yet they continued in office.\*<sup>187</sup> The two Ministers declared openly their decision to stand by the verdict of the Council from which they derived their authority and to which they owed allegiance.<sup>188</sup>

In the place of R.N. Arogyaswami Mudaliar and A. Ranganatha Mudaliar, two new Ministers—S. Muthiah Mudaliar and N. R. Sethuratnam Iyer were inducted. The new Ministers consented to co-operate with the Simon Commission. Thereafter the Chief Minister came out with his own interpretation that the vote of the House to boycott the Simon Commission was “a lead to the country and not to the Ministers”.<sup>189</sup> What were the popular Ministers for, if they did not represent the country in the legislatures? The Ministers of the Presidency thus proved “traitors to the very electorate whom they represented, to whom they owed their seats, to whom they were responsible and for whose education they were responsible”.<sup>190</sup> The British colonialists who preached democracy at home and practised the very opposite of it in India trampled with impunity the boycott resolution passed by the Legislative Council.

Following this incident a motion of no-confidence in P. Subbaroyan was tabled in the Council on 2 March 1928 by the leader of the opposition.<sup>191</sup> It was a “bald” motion stating no reasons for its want of confidence in Subbaroyan. It failed. But what struck everyone was not the motion or its defeat but the most illogical deduction drawn by the Governor from its defeat. At a subsequent meeting of the Council, Goschen reiterated that the defeat of the no-confidence motion reversed the previous vote of the Council concerning the boycott of Simon: it meant an affirmation of confidence in Subbaroyan. “Wonderful logic”—a member in the Council ejaculated.

In February 1928, the Central Legislative Assembly also rejected the Simon Commission. It was a historic verdict and “a smashing blow to British self-complacency”.<sup>192</sup> The impassioned protests made by leaders of all the parties on behalf of the country showed that in substance there was no difference between the demand of the Congress and that of the Liberal and Muslim parties in the country. The difference was only in the degree of emphasis on the various factors that constituted the national demand for *Swaraj*. The Upper Chamber—the Council of State—voted for the Commission and earned the denunciation “servile senility”.<sup>193</sup> C. San-

\* Later, however, these Ministers left their posts.



karan Nair dwelt on the powers of the Indian Committee to be appointed to confer with the Commission. He demanded that the Committee should have the right to present its own separate report to the Parliament in case of disagreement with the Commission and that its report should have the same value in the eyes of the Parliament as that of the Commission. All these were uncalled for. How much of freedom would the proposed Committee have was anybody's guess. Birkenhead had already declared that it was reserved for the Commission to accept or reject the Committee's proposals and Sankaran Nair had himself strongly animadverted on this declaration earlier!

### *Hartal:*

The day of the Commission's landing in Bombay—3 February 1928—was chosen as the day of *hartal* all over India to protest against its visit. Disturbances broke out in Madras. "The red climax was reached in what used to be known as 'the benighted Presidency' of Madras".<sup>194</sup> The agitation showed that *hartal* was a powerful form of demonstration and also an effective and educative propaganda. Everything went smooth in Madras and other parts of the Presidency till vandals entered the area. The day (3 February) dawned comparatively quiet, the only signs of the *hartal* being the suspension of all kinds of business including the sale of vegetables, meat and fish. The only life in evidence was the presence of the people in groups of six and seven at street corners and the running of tram cars almost empty. However, with the advance of the day the trouble started and increased gradually. Riff-raffs and rowdies were exploited as usual by some hidden hands to their nefarious purposes. There were disorderly scenes in many places particularly in George Town, the heart of the city, where there was mob violence culminating in destruction to public properties and a few casualties. The esplanade area became the scene of much violence and commotion. Ruined shops, burnt buildings, gutted vehicles, injured persons including Europeans and the unfortunate dead bore gruesome evidence to the organised hooliganism of anti-boycotters. Widespread panic prevailed throughout Madras. Police opened fire on the mob but that did not improve matters as the crowds became more defiant. Then military force arrived necessitating the posting of military pickets at all sensitive areas. The situation came under control only in the evening.

Notwithstanding the regrettable occurrences that took place in Madras, the *hartal* as a demonstration of the united nation-wide

desire to boycott the Simon Commission was “a complete success”.<sup>195</sup> Consequent upon these untoward incidents, Government issued orders under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code prohibiting meetings, processions, demonstrations and propaganda in connection with any future *hartal* on the occasion of the visit of the Royal Commission to Madras.<sup>196</sup> At an urgently convened meeting at Hotel Bosotto on 8 February, which was “unusually well-attended”, the European Association in Madras deplored that peaceful Madras should have begun to copy the ways of more violent places in India. Every disturbance was traced to the preaching of the “non-violent cult” which had in reality taken the turn of “inflammatory speeches, ridiculing authority and a disregard for law and order”. The Association profoundly regretted that the old “prestige” for the “Saheb” was lost. A mild threat was uttered by the Chairman of the meeting, Alexander Mac Doughall that either “prestige must stoop to conquer” in the name of Reforms or “un-sheathe the sword of repression”.<sup>197</sup>

The Government also took extraordinary pleasure in highlighting certain stray incidents to magnify the loyalty of some people to the *Raj*. The following emanates from the pen of no less a person than the Governor himself. He wrote to His Majesty the King Emperor: “One man died in the police firing. His Coffin was surrounded by little Union Jacks and bore a placard: ‘This is the work of the Congress Party’”.<sup>198</sup> Which prompted His Majesty to reply: “. . . certainly the Commission seem to have been satisfied with their visit to Madras, though your account of the previous meeting of the Legislative Council, its boycott resolution, the *hartal* and yet in spite of it the cordial welcome of the Commission, shows up the weak, unstable, irresponsible Indian character and quite unfit to govern themselves (sic)”.<sup>199</sup>

It is a fact that Governor Goschen who wrote letter after letter to Home Government belittling the influence of the Congress in the Presidency and strength of the boycotters, really dreaded the boycott. He almost admitted that the boycott of the Simon Commission was a success when he wrote that his Government was badly let down by the police which had allowed the agitation to assume the dimensions it did.<sup>200</sup> And who could deny the mental torture that the Governor went through and the sleepless nights he had from February 1928 until February 1929 when the Commission ended its second and last visit to Madras after hearing evidence?



Goschen actually launched a campaign to win support for the Commission. He wrote to the Viceroy that he would gladly welcome any change which, without impairing the status or the efficiency of the Commission, would have the advantage of easing the way for many to the support of the Commission.<sup>201</sup> He asked Subbaroyan and his Ministers to go to Telugu districts to muster support for the Simon Commission. He had talks with the Raja of Panagal, M. Krishnan Nair and A. Ramaswami Mudaliar soliciting their co-operation with the Simon Commission. He succeeded in getting an undertaking from the Raja of Panagal that his party would assist him to secure the passage of the resolution to set up a Committee to sit with the Commission through the Legislative Council.<sup>202</sup> But he was much disappointed where C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer was concerned. He felt Ramaswamy Iyer was wavering. Disillusioned as he was over the composition of the Commission, Ramaswamy Iyer did not say he was against the boycott. After his retirement on 3 March 1928,\* he told the Governor he had returned to the Liberal party to which he belonged. However, if the Liberals meant to actively boycott the Simon Commission, he would leave them, he said. The Governor therefore could not divine his real intentions.\*\*

Goschen had relief only after the following announcement was made by Simon on 23 June 1928: in the matter of access to documents the Commission would treat each Indian Committee within whose scope the material in question fell on equal terms with itself.

The Working Committee of the Tamil Nad Congress Committee had in the meantime decided against resorting to *Hartal* there-

\*T.R. Venkatarama Sastri was appointed as Law Member in his place. Finding within a couple of days after taking charge that the police portfolio hitherto held by the Law Member was not included among his subjects, Sastri resigned at once in protest. Thereupon the Government offered the post to M. Krishnan Nair of the Justice party, who readily accepted it. But the *intelligentsia* in Malabar took it as an insult to Malabar as Krishnan Nair who was a Malabari and was elected to the Council from Malabar, had accepted in an "undignified manner" a position rejected by T.R. Venkatarama Sastri. A protest Meeting was held in Malabar on 2 April 1928.

\*\*This attitude of Ramaswamy Iyer coupled with his subsequent activities annoyed Goschen so much that he influenced Irwin to decide against Ramaswamy Iyer when the Law Member's post at the centre was vacant although he would have been a great asset to them in the Assembly. He had "played his cards extremely badly", wrote Goschen to the Viceroy. (Goschen to Irwin, 3 Nov. 1928 and the latter's reply, 10 Nov. 1928, *Goschen Papers*).

after. The object of the *hartal* having been achieved in Madras, it wanted the Madras Boycott and Congress Committee to confine its activities to the holding of mass meetings condemning the Commission. It was significant that the Joint Committee of the Executive Committees of both Andhra and Tamil Nad also had reached a similar decision and had, in consequence, called off the *hartal* previously ordered by them to be observed on the day of the visit of the Simon Commission to the metropolis.<sup>203</sup> It was a wise decision where the city of Madras was concerned as powerful forces inimical to the Congress were stealthily working against it. But the prohibition imposed on propaganda put the Congress Committee at a great disadvantage. Instead of proceeding against the real law breakers, the Government of Madras chose to gag the lawful activities of the Congressmen and public-spirited people of Madras. The Congress was denied the only means whereby it could promote discipline among its own workers and sympathisers and take necessary precautions against the abuse of the *hartal*. Since *hartal* would be observed in other parts of the Presidency, the Congress Committee had to prevent the exploitation of its non-violent activities by lawless elements.<sup>204</sup>

It is necessary to review the kind of reception that Simon and his colleagues had during their peregrinations in certain parts of the Presidency. The Commission found more and more evidence of the hostility of the people in the Presidency. There were demonstrations and protest meetings wherever it set its foot. In Guntur, the citizens declared a complete *hartal* on the day the Commission set foot on its soil. In Bezwada, the *hartal* was partial as a few fugitives presented their humble petition and address to the Commission. They experienced considerable hardship in performing this unpatriotic act as they had to be ushered into the presence of Simon by a strong police force wending its way through huge crowds of boycotters. The welcome that awaited the Commission in the Southern districts was no more warm. Kumbakonam and Tanjore had expressed in no uncertain terms that the Commission was unwelcome to them. The Kumbakonam Bar Association had refused to entertain John Simon even in his capacity as a distinguished member of their profession.<sup>205</sup> Salem observed a complete *hartal*. In some places, the Commission was greeted with black flags.

Among the Muslims in Madras, there was a sharp difference of opinion between the two strong Urdu organs. The *Quami Report* bandied about such phrases as "flattery of the Government slaves"



who accepted “everlasting degradation” while the *Azad Hind* condemned the alleged efforts of the Congressmen to gag their opponents by “brute force”.<sup>206</sup>

“*Simon, Go back*”

Since the city did not observe the *hartal* the Commission's visit there on 26 February passed off uneventfully. The nationalist organs however kept on urging the public to say by its every act and conduct: “Go back Simon, we do not want you nor your patronising Commission”.<sup>207</sup> But for the sinister happenings of 3 February, brought about by “hidden hands”, and the consequent decisions, Madras also would have demonstrated peacefully its uncompromising hostility to the Commission. After the Commission's visit, some anti-Ministerialists took out a procession carrying placards denouncing Subbaroyan. They also burnt the effigies of the Ministers. The Congress leaders strongly condemned this exhibition of petulance.<sup>208</sup>

The attitude of the Madras Congressmen during the Commission's visit to the city was condemned as “cowardly” by S. Srinivasa Iyengar. All the major cities visited by the Commission had fully and faithfully carried out the decision of the All Parties' Conference by unequivocally repudiating the Commission. The only major city which failed was Madras—the place which was the first to hold aloft the banner of boycott. He wanted them to carry on the agitation till the goal of complete independence was reached. He also wanted a house-to-house propaganda to be undertaken to obtain signatures to the following pledge:

“I shall pledge myself to have nothing to do with the Simon Commission at any stage in any manner or form and to persuade to the best of my ability, as many of my countrymen as I can, to have nothing to do with the Commission”.<sup>209</sup>

The Justice Party which was second to none in advocating an absolute boycott of the Commission in the beginning of 1928 had since changed its attitude thoroughly. Subbaroyan's manoeuvres to get their co-operation were not in vain. Bureaucracy's unfailing methods of persuasion proved too irresistible to the Justicites. Their spokesman A. Ramaswami Mudaliar started pleading for the formation of the Indian Committee of Provincial Legislatures to co-operate with the Simon Commission. The Justice Party's *volte face* caused some uneasiness in the Congress circles. Their suggestion that all the non-co-operating members of the Legislative

Council should resign and seek re-election on the boycott issue was not favourably received. This was because of the uncertainty of success in the election and the expense involved.

The Madras Legislative Council which was prorogued in the beginning of 1928 met only on 6 September mainly to appoint a Provincial Committee to confer with the Commission. When a motion to this effect was moved by Marjoribanks, its admissibility was questioned as it was in direct contravention of the earlier motion not to operate with the Commission. At this stage, Satyamurti brought an adjournment motion to discuss a matter of urgent importance namely, the South Indian Railway strike. This annoyed the President of the Council who pulled up Satyamurti several times calling him to order. Satyamurti lost his temper and withdrew his motion.<sup>210</sup> The Swarajist members walked out. Marjoribank's motion was carried. The Council elected a Committee of seven members\* to jointly confer with the Indian Statutory Commission on the terms stated in the letter of the Chairman of the Commission already referred to.<sup>211</sup> All communities and all political parties except the Swarajists were represented on it. A.P. Patro was the Chairman of this Committee.

The happenings at the Legislative Council had interesting side effects. In the High Court of Madras, C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer moved on behalf of the Swarajya party for an injunction against the ruling of the President of the Legislative Council. Irwin was astonished, finding it hard to believe that Ramaswamy Iyer should have thought fit to argue the Swarajist point of view in the High Court. He wrote that Ramaswamy Iyer was perhaps "only acting professionally; he seems to me to have gone very much to the Left since leaving office and I hope he is not going to follow Sapru's example. They are curious people".<sup>212</sup> Later Ramaswamy Iyer withdrew his motion as the resolution to elect the Legislative Committee had been passed.

#### *Simon's second visit:*

The Simon Commission began its second visit to India in October 1928. It visited Madras only on 18 February 1929 as this city was chosen to be the last lap of the Commission's itinerary. Madras

\* (1) S. Kumaraswamy Reddy, (2) A.P. Patro, (3) Kumararaja of Venktagiri, (4) P. Khalif-ul-lah Sahib Bahadur, (5) Daniel Thomas, (6) P. Shiva Rao, and (7) N. Siva Raj.



was the first province to raise the banner of boycott by her resolution which was faithfully carried out by all the important centres visited by the Commission. Recalling this, Motilal Nehru in an appeal made to the Madras Nationalists on the eve of the Commission's second visit to Madras said, "Let Madras accomplish the final fulfilment of the national resolve in a fitting manner".<sup>213</sup> And so, upon Madras devolved the onerous duty of proving in no uncertain terms that if twelve months ago, the whole country unanimously declared that the "Statutory Commission was unwanted, it was a thousand times less wanted to-day".<sup>214</sup>

The Congress leaders under the lead of Srinivasa Iyengar appealed to all to boycott the Commission and observe strictest non-violence while doing so. Almost all the parties became united and the Moderates were no longer Moderates on this issue.<sup>215</sup> Some people expressed reservations about the participation of students in the boycott. They had in mind the treatment meted out to patriotic students by the college authorities on similar occasions earlier. But Srinivasa Iyengar was firm on this issue. Having issued a general appeal to all to join he could not go back on it and ask the students to withdraw. Getting punishment or paying fine was a sacrifice, he said. If the students felt for the cause, they had to obey the boycott call.<sup>216</sup> The Adi-Dravidas were particularly appealed to by the Congress leaders to remain loyal to their motherland and work for freedom. They were assured that a free India would give them more than what they could expect from John Simon and his colleagues. But they were not prepared to listen. They presented an address to Simon.

The Government took the fullest precautionary measures against the boycotters. They were, by physical force, forbidden access to the harbour where the Corporation of Madras under its Justicite President A. Ramaswami Mudaliar, presented a welcome address to the Commission. They were also cordoned off by the police from the High Court Beach where a public boycott meeting was being organised. Urchins sticking wall-posters were attacked and arrested.<sup>217</sup> The Government did everything possible to break the spirit of the boycott campaign. But the campaigners stood firm on making the boycott a complete success. They had to prove that Madras did not fail the country. Splendid discipline was maintained by the non-violent boycotters throughout the *hartal* on 18 February 1929. Barring the European firms, business was suspended throughout the city. Schools and Colleges worked and vehicles plied as

usual but the Committee had expressly exempted these in order to prevent unnecessary dislocation of essential services. The success of the campaign had to be gauged from the enormous gathering of the boycotters. The demonstrators whose strength swelled by constant additions went in an orderly procession towards the harbour. However when the police barbed the way and threatened physical force if they persisted in marching further, the boycotters desisted. The police certainly deserved kudos for smuggling the Commission through the city to their destination “without their eyes and ears being assailed by unpleasant truths”.<sup>218</sup>

The most deplorable act of the police was the arrest of prominent Andhra leaders like Konda Venkatappiah, T. Prakasam and Ponniah Sastri who were attending a meeting at the Madras Mahajana Sabha. They were subsequently released after futile efforts on the part of the authorities to induce them to give certain undertakings which no self-respecting leader would give.<sup>219</sup> These arbitrary acts on the part of the executive were perhaps part of a wider *coup d'état* it was contemplating. But the arrest, the farcical enquiry and release made one wonder whether posing a menace to personal liberty was a favourite pastime of the bureaucracy of those days.

All this fuss about the Commission was made just to enable it to examine a few available official witnesses. Except a small group in the Presidency and those “who held office as Ministers by some chance”, and the officials, nobody had tendered before the Commission any evidence worth the name.<sup>220</sup>

#### *The Corporation Clique:*

A proposal was brought at the Corporation of Madras on 5 February 1929 to present an address of welcome to John Simon. A request was made *inter alia* to the Council to sanction an amount of Rs. 100/- towards expenses connected therewith. Some members objected to it. Speaking against the proposal, Satyamurti cited instances of several institutions which had passed the boycott resolution; even the non-Swarajist Mayor of Calcutta preferred a personal dinner to the Commission without involving the Council in the welcome. The motion was nevertheless passed by a narrow majority.<sup>221</sup>

As seen earlier, an address was presented to the Commission by A. Ramaswami Mudaliar, President of the Corporation, at the



harbour and not at the Council Chamber. This in itself was felt to be a "grave slight on the self respect of the premier municipal Corporation of the Presidency". But a graver insult was the President's blameworthy failure to send the invitation to some Councillors. He thus wantonly ignored a section of the House. The sequel was, there was pandemonium at the next meeting of the Corporation Council on 19 February 1929. The uninvited members vehemently protested against the deliberate affront to a representative body on the part of the President. They strongly objected to the wording of the welcome address which began "We, the President, and Councillors of the Corporation of Madras". There was so much tumult and confusion in the Council that the President finding it impossible to conduct the proceedings, dissolved the meeting.<sup>222</sup> Surprisingly, the *Madras Mail* condemned the proposal of the Corporation to present an address of welcome and defended the indignation of the uninvited councillors.<sup>223</sup> The Pro-British paper was unpredictable in its attitude on certain occasions.

Later, at a public meeting held on 22 February, Ramaswami Mudaliar claimed that he was well within rights in not issuing invitations to those members who had opposed the presentation of an address to the Commission. This was dismissed by many as untenable inasmuch as the address had been presented on behalf of the Corporation as a whole. The controversy came to an end only when the President expressed regret at his action at a meeting of the Corporation Council and Satyamurti and Burra Satyanarayana apologised for using unparliamentary language at the previous meeting.<sup>224</sup>

Having done the first part of their task, Simon and his team left India in April 1929. The second part of the task namely, the preparation of the report was to begin in England soon after the general elections. It was expected that the nature of the Commission's report would be influenced by the verdict of the British electorate. While leaving India, Simon seemed to have said that he was "sorry to leave; but glad to go".<sup>225</sup>

Before his departure, the Government of Madras presented a Memorandum to Simon which gave a frank assessment of the functioning of Diarchy in the Presidency. The Memorandum constituted a severe condemnation of diarchy and an admission that there could be no half-way house to responsible government. It had frankly stated that any further reforms should introduce real

responsibility. The Memorandum contained valuable proposals for Madras some of which deserve to be recorded here. Complete Provincial autonomy was recommended. The Provincial Government would be composed of the Governor appointed by the Crown, a ministry of eight and a single Legislative Chamber. In the Legislative Council there would be no place for officials as all provincial subjects would be transferred. Nominated elements would be there to provide for the representation of certain interests which ought to figure there—"Depressed classes and the backward tracts".<sup>226</sup> In regard to the franchise, the Government did not recommend any extension, the reason being that since the advent of the reforms there had been no change in the economic or educational condition of the people which would render the lowering of the franchise either desirable or necessary.<sup>227</sup>

As regards separate electorates, the Memorandum did not favour all the existing eight categories. In the case of Mohammadans, Europeans, Anglo Indians, land holders, and those representing trade and commerce, there would be separate electorates as there was enough justification for it. Separate electorate was not considered desirable in the case of planting industry; its elimination was recommended in the case of Indian Christians; and regarding University, the Memorandum said: "University representation had its origin in the peculiar position of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and it is difficult to perceive how its extension to mere examining bodies can be justified. In Madras, at any rate, the University voters (graduates) represented no particular interest that is not fully represented in a general constituency. It might perhaps be useful if a true academic or educational standpoint should find a place and a spokesman in the Legislative Council. To this end, while retaining the one seat for the three universities which now exist (Madras, Andhra and Annamalai), we would have the member returned by the votes of the three combined senates and not as a person by the votes of the general body of the graduates".<sup>228</sup>

The Memorandum recommended the continuance of the reservation of seats for the non-Brahmans and with it for the rural constituencies.<sup>229</sup>

While it recommended full provincial autonomy for Madras, it observed there should be no attempt at uniformity in the pace of advance for all provinces. The Memorandum envisaged the Government of India of the future as a Federal system in which the residuary



powers would be reserved to the Provinces. Only then, in its view, could Indian States be brought into the Federation. Though it had a few proposals which were not unassailable, it was still a memorable Memorandum. Its most significant feature lay in the Government's unequivocal condemnation of diarchy as a system of Government. Goschen made no secret of its inherent unworkability which experience for nearly a decade had amply demonstrated. Instead of being an effective first step in responsible Government, it had only increased irresponsibility all round. The Government admitted that under the diarchic dispensation there was no effective control of the legislature over the ministers which was a *sine qua non* of responsible Government.

The defects enumerated in the Memorandum were manifest much earlier. Congressmen and other critics of the reforms had been pointing them to the Government over the years only to be accused by the bureaucrats and ultra loyalists of wrecking the system. The Justice party itself was fully aware of the unworkability of the system. R. K. Shanmukham Chetty, a Justiceite with progressive views, pronounced diarchy to be a miserable failure in the country. He even quoted P. Rajagopala Achariar, member of the Secretary of State's Council as having said: "If Diarchy worked till 1929, all provincial M.L.Cs should be sent to the Lunatic Asylum".<sup>230</sup> Anyway, the grasp of realities on the part of the Government of Goschen was widely welcomed since "belated wisdom is better than the prestige-ridden persistence in folly".<sup>231</sup>

The Simon Commission which left India after taking evidences in April 1929, did not submit its report until June 1930. The reason adduced by it for the delay was that the Commission had to consider a vast range of subjects. That the Commission was diffident of its capacity is vouched by the statement of Governor Goschen: "The members of the Commission were tired and wearied and some of them a little frayed in their nerves and pessimistic as to what they could say in their report. It appears as if there will be a Majority Report by six and a Die Hard Minority Report by Burnham. . . ." <sup>232</sup> No Political leader or party of consequence attached any importance to this Parliamentary Commission which was doomed to oblivion from the moment of its birth. Its fate was officially sealed when on 31 October 1929, Viceroy Irwin made the following two announcements soon after his return from England:

- 1) In view of the doubts which have been expressed both in Great Britain and India regarding the interpretation to be placed on the intentions of

the British Government in enacting the Statute of 1919, "I am authorised on behalf of His Majesty's Government to state clearly that, in their judgment, it is implicit in the Declaration of 1917, that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress as there contemplated is the attainment of Dominion Status".

- 2) To disperse the distrust concerning British intentions which had been aggravated by the exclusion of Indians from the Statutory Commission, he also declared that, after the report of the Simon Commission, there should be a round table conference in London to which Indians would be invited in order to express their views before proposals for the future government of India were laid before the British Parliament.

The Viceregal announcement created considerable excitement in India as the people sincerely believed a radical change was in the offing. Those who gave the Commission a lukewarm support from considerations of prestige and many other unworthy motives, felt relieved that after all the fanfare the Commission was "dead and decently buried".<sup>233</sup> However, Irwin's statement made without consulting the Statutory Commission and before the latter had reported, caused a storm in both the Houses of the British Parliament. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald allayed the fears of the members of Parliament when he stated in the House of Commons on 7 November 1929, that the Government had come to the decision that Irwin's declaration would not be inexpedient; nor would it do any harm to the Commission.<sup>234</sup>

#### *Exercise in futility:*

The Viceroy's announcement did not bring about any change in the political situation which continued to be tense. Gandhiji and many other Congress leaders were languishing in different jails in India. It was in this explosive situation that John Simon re-emerged on the scene with his celebrated Report after an inordinate delay of 14 months! He expected the world to believe that his Commission could not prepare the report until the Central Committee led by C. Sankaran Nair had concluded its sittings in London in September 1929. The public knew only too well that the much advertised "Joint Free Conference" was neither joint, nor free, nor conference.<sup>235</sup>

The main recommendations of Simon's "archaic" though "well-written" report of 409 pages in two volumes were: replacement of diarchy by full responsible government in the provinces, the Gover-



nors still retaining special powers in an emergency; retention of communal electorates which, the existence of racial and religious differences, had rendered necessary: and need to take into consideration the Indian States also along with the provinces of British India in any constitutional reconstruction. The report thus advocated a provincial autonomy hedged in with safeguards. It made no recommendation for responsible Government at the Centre. It exaggerated communal strife because it was designed to show that India was unfit for self government. The Report emphasised two points: (1) the six years that had elapsed since the Lee Commission reported had not lessened the need for the British element in the security services; (2) communal tension had increased and it had never been denied seriously that the impartiality of the British—an impartiality which he owes to his origin—gave him a special value in administration.<sup>236</sup>

The report contained no mention of Dominion Status. It met with a very hostile reception everywhere. *The Hindu* called the report a “constitutional freak”. P. S. Sivaswamy Iyer wanted it to be thrown into the scrap-heap.<sup>237</sup> Wedgewood Benn, the new Secretary of State for India “thrust it into the wastepaper basket”.<sup>238</sup> The non-official Europeans also condemned it as it paid little attention to European commercial opinion. The voluminous report devoted a mere page and a half to non-official Europeans. The influence of Chambers of Commerce and Trades Association was hardly referred to at all.<sup>239</sup>

### *Achievements:*

It must be said to the credit of the Justice party that notwithstanding its communal policy and loyalty to the *Raj*, its Ministers administered the Presidency with a sense of dedication. Some of the Ministers had played their roles with distinction and had been responsible for some very praiseworthy legislative measures. The Justice as well as the Independent Ministers are entitled to the encomia of even unborn generations of Tamil Nad and Andhra for what they achieved within the severe financial constraints under which the *Transferred* half had to operate.

The Andhra University is the creation of the Justice Ministers. Though the University was started during the period of the Independent Ministry headed by Subbaroyan, the Andhra University Bill was initiated by A.P. Patro, Education Minister in 1925. The

demand of the people of Andhra, who represented a separate linguistic and cultural unit, for a University of their own was a long standing one. The poor students of the Andhra districts had all along been deprived of educational opportunities. They could not aspire for higher courses of study including professional and technical ones, as it was beyond their means to pursue their studies at colleges outside the Telugu territory. The Bill became law on 29 January 1929 and the University came into being the same year amidst rejoicings of the people of Andhra.\* <sup>240</sup>

The Annamalai University was founded in 1928. The Bill for this University in Chidambaram was introduced in September 1928 by P. Subbaroyan. It was rendered possible by the munificent gift of about 40 lakhs of rupees offered to the Government by Annamalai Chetty of Chettinad, the great philanthropist and illustrious founder of the Sri Meenakshi College in Chidambaram. It was a residential and unitary type of University, the first of its kind in the whole of South India. It included the faculty of technology also. Even Satyamurti did not hesitate to praise the Government when he stated: "To the best of my knowledge, it has not so far done anything half as generous, and half as graceful as it has done in this matter". The reference to Government's generosity pointed to the voluntary enhancement from 20 to 27 lakhs of rupees it made as its contribution to the University. <sup>241</sup> The Bill was passed into law on 14 October 1928<sup>242</sup> amidst loud cheering and clapping of hands in the House and "a chorus of well-deserved encomiums". <sup>243</sup>

Another important measure which deserves mention is the State Aid to Industries Act of 1922 which aimed at regulating government's aid to industries. It was initiated and piloted through the House by K.V. Reddy Naidu. It was designed to encourage new and nascent industries suitable to and not hitherto established in the Presidency of Madras. It enabled the Government to assist cottage and other small industrialists to build up business. The State assistance was afforded partly by direct financial aid and partly by providing, on favourable terms, raw materials such as firewood, water etc. which were the property of Government. The Bill was read for the first time on 14 November 1922; the report of the Select Committee was presented on 19 December and the measure was passed into law on 20 December. The Act received

\* The ceded districts and Chittoor were exempt from the operation of the Andhra University Act as they preferred to be under the Madras University.



the assent of the Governor and the Viceroy and was brought into force. K.V. Reddy Naidu, the author of the measure, declared that this was the best achievement of his life.

The Madras Debtors' Protection Act of 1934 was yet another measure, which earned the Justice Party the gratitude of the poorer sections of Society. By this legislation, every payment made by the debtor to the creditor would be supported by a voucher in the handwriting of the creditor which would be in the possession of the debtor. It was thus intended to safeguard a large number of debtors in the Presidency against their own illiteracy, ignorance and incapacity<sup>244</sup>. In 1935, by an amendment Bill which was passed into law immediately, the rate of interest was fixed at 9 per cent in the case of secured debts and 15 per cent in the case of unsecured ones.<sup>245</sup>

These measures have been cited to show that the animosity of the Justice leaders towards the Brahmans having become less and less virulent by the mid 1920s, they could concentrate on some constructive measures. P.T. Chetty himself had said on certain occasions by way of clarification that he was only against the political Brahmans and not against the Brahmans as such. Shockingly, by the mid 1920s, the Congress had become infected with the virus of caste hatred. Circumstances were created to bring about a polarization of the Congress on the basis of caste. The sequel was a meaningless and endless caste-war within the Provincial Congress.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# Anti-Brahman Wave in Madras Congress

The year 1925 was not an auspicious year for the Madras Presidency. It witnessed the passing away of some of its stalwart Nationalists like Subrahmania Siva, S. Subrahmania Iyer, V.V.S. Iyer, S.K. Krishnaswamy Sarma and V. Pakkiriswamy Pillai. P.T. Chetty who was an ardent Congressman until he launched the Non-Brahman Movement also died in 1925.\* These were coincidental happenings and were beyond the power of humans to repair. But the Presidency suffered a greater misfortune in falling a victim once again to caste-politics.

The Congress in Madras was infected with the virus of caste-hatred. It was a most shocking development particularly at a time when the Justice Party was waning and there was a hopeful sign of communalism yielding gradually to nationalism. It was a pity that the handful of men responsible for inflaming communal passions failed to realise two fundamental factors: (1) the more the national body was riven by caste politics, the farther it travelled away from national ideals and aspirations; and (2) it would be unfair and unpardonable to bedevil the national body with fresh issues when it was engaged in the supreme struggle for freedom and had to sort out many issues like council entry, office acceptance etc. Non-Brahman Congressmen of the younger generation like M. Bhaktavatsalam\*\* were much grieved at the new turn of events. It pained them to realise that caste enmities were rekindled by no less a person than the President of the Tamil Nad Congress Committee.

### *The Gurukulam Controversy:*

What started as a small social reform question over the func-

\* Deshbandhu C.R. Das and Surendranath Banerjee also passed away in 1925.

\*\* Advocate, later gave up his profession in favour of politics; Chief Minister of Madras (1963-67).



tioning of a national school, snowballed into a war against Brahmins. It culminated in one section of the Congress leaving the organisation for good and indulging in activities which scandalised even the Justicites. Their exit certainly did not cripple the Congress. As M. Bhaktavatsalam put it in his letter to *The Hindu*, "Much greater men have left the Congress for much worthier reasons, and yet the Congress is now stronger than it has been. . . . ."<sup>1</sup> But it was most unfortunate that the congressmen who left the body made much ado about a minor issue and would not stop short of a crusade against a particular caste.

The Tamil *Gurukulam* was founded in 1922 by V.V.S. Iyer at Kallidaikurichi but was later shifted to Shermadevi (both in Tinneveli district). It was started with a view to making it "a modern Madura and Takshasila, modern Nalanda and Navadvipa". It was a National Institution intended to rouse in the youngsters of the Presidency the spirit of patriotism and nationalism. It was an Institution dedicated to mould the character of the youngsters to the national task. An institution intended to achieve high ideals under the inspiring stewardship of V.V.S. Iyer had the least difficulty in receiving handsome donations from the public. Iyer himself donated a thousand rupees apart from making over the proceeds from the sale of his books to the *Gurukulam*\*. His co-worker Mahadeva Iyer raised a sum of Rs.20,000/- from the Nattukkottai Chetties of Malaya.<sup>2</sup> The TNCC sanctioned a sum of Rs. 10,000/- and paid Rs. 5,000/- initially.<sup>3</sup> It was functioning smoothly until it was caught in the vexed caste war.

The controversy began over the issue of commensality in the *Gurukulam*. There had been only a common mess but two Brahman students, whose parents had an objection for cosmopolitan meals, were given separate accommodation. It was only a concession given to the two Brahman boys. There was no question of segregating the non-Brahman boys at all; it was the two Brahman boys, who were segregated from the rest, of course, at their parents' request. This practice was taken to the notice of P. Varadarajulu Naidu, President of the TNCC, by one of the students who was a relative of O.P. Ramaswami Reddy. Naidu concluded that caste discrimination was being practised in the mess. This was far from the truth but nothing could deflect him from his decision to make an issue of it.

\* The notable ones were two English translations of the *Kural* (Tamil) and the commentary on the Tamil epic *Kamba Ramayanam*.

The matter was placed before Gandhiji who, after hearing Naidu's grievances in detail, wrote: as far as the existing *brahma-charis* were concerned, the rules then in operation would continue; but for the future it might be announced that "No *brahma-charis* would be accepted whose parents would not let their boys dine in the same row with the others".<sup>4</sup> Iyer also came out with the statement that in future the students admitted into the *Gurukulam* would be given no exemption from the general mess rules.<sup>5</sup>

As ill-luck would have it, Naidu and his friends were not satisfied with Iyer's assurance. While they did not object to the concession extended to the two Brahman boys, they disapproved of the appointment of a Brahman cook and thus infused new life into the controversy. They insisted on the appointment of cooks from all castes including the panchamas. It was undoubtedly a welcome proposal. Iyer himself, who was above all petty caste considerations and dined with all, had no personal objection at all to the proposal. But it was an issue which concerned the students and their parents. Iyer was absolutely right when he said that the time was not ripe for such a reform particularly in an area riven by caste prejudices. The necessary disposition had to be inculcated in the scholars and their parents before introducing the reform contemplated by Naidu. Any rash act, he apprehended, would lead to a large number of students — both Brahmans and non-Brahmans — leaving the *Gurukulam*.

Naidu stuck to his guns and convened a meeting of some of the non-Brahman members of the Congress at the TNCC office. It was resolved therein that the money already contributed to the *Gurukulam* by the TNCC should be refunded. He wrote that if Iyer "does not return the money before the end of April the sum of rupees five thousand which was granted by the TNCC and the other sums which the Tamils want to be refunded, a satyagraha will be started in the month of May for taking possession of the property of the *Gurukulam*".<sup>6</sup> How could Iyer refund the donations given for developmental work by men of different shades of opinion? Besides, they were not conditional grants. It appeared unreasonable on the part of Naidu to threaten to have recourse to satyagraha to get possession of the *gurukulam* which was not the property of Iyer to be given away at the former's demand or the latter's pleasure.

Naidu had a staunch supporter in E.V. Ramaswami Naicker in this demand. Though Naidu and Naicker had nothing in common, they fully concurred on this issue. Speaking at a public meeting



in Salem, Naicker said that they must settle the Brahman question even while the British supremacy lasted; otherwise, the non-Brahmans would have to suffer under the tyranny of what he described as "Brahmanocracy".<sup>7</sup> As the Secretary of the TNCC, Naicker refused to pay the balance of Rs. 5,000/- due to the *Gurukulam* unless the common mess was conceded. It was clear from this refusal that he did not accept Gandhiji's advice. Iyer, however, managed to get the cheque for the aforesaid amount from the Joint Secretary of the Committee without the knowledge of Naicker.<sup>8</sup> This enraged Naicker who declared an "all-out-war" on the *Gurukulam*.

Various public meetings were held where unreasonable attacks were made by Naidu and Naicker against the *Gurukulam* and the Brahmans. Two separate issues were thus clubbed into one in the "blindness of passion". They thus threw the apple of discord which threatened to endanger any positive political activity in Tamil Nad. Naidu actually out-stepped his limits when he called Iyer and Rajaji the enemies of non-Brahmans. Iyer with his broad outlook had a most glorious record of selfless and patriotic work behind him. Rajaji actually ate with the panchamas along with his two children, the food prepared by non-Brahmans, at his Gandhi ashram in Tiruchengodu (Salem Dist.).

Many of Naidu's non-Brahman friends in the Congress felt that he was abusing his position as President of the TNCC by his anti-Brahman agitation. M. Bhaktavatsalam said that while Gandhiji wanted 1925 to be a "Spinning Year", Naidu had made it a "Non-Brahman Year".<sup>9</sup> The non-Hindu members of the Madras Congress also were unhappy over the controversy, particularly when the donations to the *Gurukulam* had been utilised properly for the purpose for which they were given. They pointed out that the TNCC consisted not merely of Brahmans and non-Brahmans but also of Christians and Mohammadans. The Committee could not, therefore, take sides in a quarrel which was purely sectional. The filthy expressions used by Naidu while referring to the teaching staff of the *Gurukulam* were strongly objected to by a Muslim member who threw a poser to Naidu. Stating that in Madras there were educational institutions for which the Hindus, the Muslims, the Jews, the Jains and the Buddhists freely donated but from which all except European boys were vigorously excluded, he asked Naidu if he could set right this anomaly first.<sup>10</sup>

When the controversy was at its height, V. Kalyanasundara

Mudaliar appealed to Iyer through the columns of the *Navasakti* to change the character of the institution so that it could continue to retain the goodwill of all the communities. He also suggested that the *Gurukulam* be shifted to some place other than Shermadevi where Iyer would be free to run the school on non-sectarian lines. Unfortunately Iyer was not disposed to take kindly to the counsel of Mudaliar. He felt that even a fair minded opponent as *Navasakti*, was lending support to a "malicious campaign in Tamil Nad".<sup>11</sup>

From the tone of the attacks of Naidu, Naicker and their associates, Iyer concluded that they had developed a special hatred for him. So he resolved to step down to make it easier for other members of the *ashram* to negotiate with them. Accordingly, he resigned on 21 April 1925. Iyer stated in his letter of resignation, "I see symbolically the Tamil nation attempting to commit suicide like the Yadavas of old. I have only to acknowledge with grief that the poison of communal hate has entered deep into the heart of an important section of Tamil political society".<sup>12</sup> On 28 April the *Ashramites* elected T.R. Mahadeva Iyer as the new *Acharya* of the *Gurukulam*.

Notwithstanding the opposition, Naidu and Naicker raised the inter-dining issue at the annual meeting of the TNCC on 29 April. There were arguments and counter arguments. Resolutions were moved by Naidu,\* Rajaji\*\* and S. Ramanathan. The first two were lost. The third resolution which was to the effect that the gradation of merit based on birth should not be observed by any institution participating in the National Movement was carried; it also recommended the appointment of a committee consisting of V. Theagaraja Chetty of Devakottai, S. Ramanathan (Mover) and E.V. Ramaswami Naicker to help the *Gurukulam* implement this principle.

The resolution was accepted because the Brahman members were divided. The non-Brahmans took a unanimous stand. S. Srinivasa Iyengar and his friends supported the motion while almost all the other leading Brahman members including Rajaji, T.S.S. Rajan, C. Vijayaragavachari, K. Santanam, Swaminatha Sastri and N.S.

\* The first resolution expressed regret at having paid a grant of Rs. 5000/- to the *Gurukulam*.

\*\* The second resolution deprecated public interference in details of the internal management of institutions like the *Gurukulam*, but in view of the agitation, the TNCC should advise the authorities of *Gurukulam* that all pupils should dine together without distinction.



Varadachari opposed it. Naidu's group remarked that the Brahmans were essentially communal in outlook. This provoked the Brahmans to move a resolution against Naidu censuring him for "endangering national unity by promoting communal ill-feeling in Tamil Society". This resolution was rejected. But it served to widen the rift between the two castes. It prompted Naidu to declare that the "*Gurukulam* is going to be the deciding factor in the national life of the non-Brahmans".<sup>13</sup> He held out threats of a more serious anti-Brahman agitation if his campaign failed. "If I win it should be a glory to both Brahmans and non-Brahmans; but if I fail, the consequences would be disastrous to Brahmans", he said.<sup>14</sup>

The opponents of Ramanathan's motion resigned from the TNCC and appealed to the AICC to interfere on their behalf. But the latter refused to do so. Confirming the decision of the TNCC, it advised the members to join the ranks of the Congress in Tamil Nad ignoring the whole unpleasant episode.

Naicker and Ramanathan who went to the *Gurukulam* as per the resolution failed to dispense with the caste restrictions. The *Gurukulam* continued without changing its mess rules under the leadership of T.R. Mahadeva Iyer. Finally, Kavyakanta Ganapathi Sastri, an enlightened Brahman from Tiruvannamalai and V. Shanmugam Chetty, Secretary, Working Committee, took upon themselves the task of negotiating with the *Ashram* authorities.<sup>15</sup> While the parleys were still on, Iyer passed away. He met with a fatal accident at the Papanasam Falls on 3 June 1925 when both he and his dear little daughter were carried away by the current.<sup>16</sup>

In August 1927, Gandhiji advised Mahadeva Iyer to "gracefully and instantaneously" give up possession of the Institution to a Committee consisting of the Chief donors. Gandhiji wrote three letters to him repeating his advice.<sup>17</sup> Mahadeva Iyer's reactions to Gandhiji's advice are not known. *The Gurukulam* ceased to function after August 1927.<sup>18</sup>

### *Demand for Communal Representation: Its defeat:*

The heat and passion over the *Gurukulam* affair had not subsided when the Tamil Nad Provincial Conference was held at Conjeevaram from 21 to 23 November 1925 to consider the question of Council entry. V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar presided over the conference; C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar\* was the Chairman of the

\*A rich landlord from Poonamallee; uncle of M. Bhaktavatsalam.

Reception Committee. The prominent members who participated in this conference were V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, S. Srinivasa Iyengar, P. Varadarajulu Naidu, A. Rangaswamy Iyengar, M. Singaravelu Chetty, Rajaji, K. Bhashyam Iyengar, Sami Venkatachalam Chetty, M. Bhaktavatsalam, E.V. Ramaswami Naicker and others. One special feature about this conference was that some Justice party members like A. Ramaswami Mudaliar, Kannappan,\* C.R. Reddy and T.A. Ramalingam Chetty were also present.<sup>19</sup>

Srinivasa Iyengar moved two resolutions which were to be considered by the Congress that was to meet at Cawnpur in December of that year. The first motion, which was widely welcomed, recommended the adoption of the resolution already passed by the AICC at Patna with the modification that *khadar* should always be worn by Congressmen. The second one recommended that the Congress should conduct political work more vigorously than the Swarajya party had hitherto done; it should also carry on the campaign of capturing the Councils so that the Swarajya party could be done away with before the elections of 1926. There should be no acceptance of office. The Congress programme should be one of destruction so as to make diarchy impossible. They should "agitate, agitate and paralyse the Government".<sup>20</sup>

Ramaswami Naicker participated in the conference only to clinch the issue of communal representation. Since early 1920s, Naicker had been trying in vain to bring up the communal issue at the various conferences of the TNCC at Tinnevely, Tiruppur, Salem and Tiruvannamalai. He nursed a grudge against the Brahman members of the Congress who he thought were responsible for undermining his efforts. A few weeks prior to the Conjeevaram conference, he wrote in his *Kudi Arasu* stressing that the TNCC should decide on giving statutory status to the principle of communal representation at this meeting.<sup>21</sup>

Actually, before the conference, two meetings of the non-Brahmans were held with a view to arriving at a precise formula in respect of communal representation. It was decided to ask the Congress to put up at least 90 per cent of non-Brahman candidates of whom  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent should be members of the depressed classes. But this was opposed by many. Ultimately a resolution was adopted to the effect that no less than one half of the candidates selected and

\* Editor, *Dravidan*.



supported by the Nationalists for the non-Mohammadan territorial seats should be other than Brahmans; in case a larger number of suitable candidates was available, the Standing Committee should be instructed to increase the proportion of non-Brahmans.<sup>22</sup> It was thus evident that every practical minded person recognised the need for increased non-Brahman representation. But Naicker was not satisfied.

At the meeting of the Subjects Committee of the conference on 21 November, Naicker brought forward two resolutions. One was intended to secure communal representation by means of separate electorates for non-Brahmans, Brahmans and depressed classes. The other one urged the constitution of a Selection Committee to nominate candidates for the elections in the Madras Presidency in anticipation of the Congress decision at Cawnpur to run the elections itself. There were lengthy discussions over the resolutions, both sides indulging in much "acid criticism".<sup>23</sup> The first resolution was lost. As for the second, the Committee eventually adopted a modified resolution. It recommended the constitution of a Committee for the nomination of candidates for the 1926 elections with due regard to the interest of the communities when the Congress adopted the programme of the Swarajya party regarding council entry.

Naicker, who was much disappointed at the outcome, informed the Committee that he would again move his resolutions at the main session. It was then suggested by the President V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, that Naicker might do so provided his first resolution had the support of 25 delegates. In the mean time S. Srinivasa Iyengar had withdrawn his resolution which recommended that the Congress should undertake the campaign of capturing the councils. Since Naicker's resolution was allied to this, it was expected that he too would not press for his motion. The question of proportionate representation could be considered only if council entry was accepted.

But Naicker and 24 others moved the same resolution which was earlier rejected at the Subjects Committee meeting. The President ruled it out of order. When interrogated, he told the mover that it was not an arbitrary ruling and that he had weighty reasons to support his decisions. He also said that he did not do it under the advice or influence of any. The Congress at that stage stood for the boycott of council as decided at the Nagpur session in 1920. The Conference was convened under the auspices of the TNCC to discuss the issue of council entry. It was not got up by the Swarajya party.

Since the question of council entry was being pursued by the Swarajya party, the proper place for Naicker to move his resolution was the Swarajya Party and not the Congress.<sup>24</sup>

Naicker and his followers walked out of the Conference.

Naicker accused Srinivasa Iyengar of having deliberately withdrawn his motion. He attributed this act to a clandestine understanding between Iyengar and Rajaji to invalidate his motion on communal representation.<sup>25</sup> Naicker became furious with the non-Brahmans also when there was no support for his motion from them.

After the Conjeevaram conference Naicker was convinced that he could do nothing to promote the interests of the non-Brahmans by remaining in the Congress. His subsequent misunderstanding with K. Santanam further strengthened his conviction. He was the President of All India Spinners Association and K. Santanam, its Secretary. There were many Brahmans employed in the Association, which according to Naicker, was yet another ruse to foster the Brahmans' interest in the organisations sponsored by the Indian National Congress.<sup>26</sup> Naicker's attempts to undo the work of Santanam did not fructify as Gandhiji's interference was sought by the latter. He felt that Gandhiji himself served the interests of the Brahmans. He even said that Gandhiji would please the Brahmans if anything was to be achieved.<sup>27</sup>

During the elections of 1926 Naicker remained very much within the Congress but carried on anti-Congress propaganda. He was regularly attending the meetings of the Justice Party which was objected to by many members of the Congress. He attended their Federation at Coimbatore on 2 July 1927 along with V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar and Varadarajulu Naidu at their invitation. They were asked to express their candid opinions on the policy whether or not the members of the Justice Party should opt for the Indian National Congress. Though he felt compelled to toe the line of the other two, Naicker was strongly opposed to the suggestion. In his speech at this meeting, he openly expressed his animosity for Brahmans and condemned the Governor for appointing C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer as the Law Member. He even tabled a motion urging the Viceroy to recall Governor Goschen but it was withdrawn at the instance of the Justice leaders.<sup>28</sup> Naicker sensed that even in the Justice Party he would have no scope to bring about the social changes he was contemplating.

Still he continued in the Congress. It was Gandhiji's exposition of the code of *varnashrama dharma* and the glowing tributes he



paid to Brahmans for their contribution to Indian culture, that provided the proverbial last straw. Describing the Brahman as the “finest flower of Hinduism and humanity”, Gandhiji said: “I will do nothing to wither it. I know that it is well able to take care of itself. It has weathered many a storm before now. Only let it not be said of non-Brahmans that they attempted to rob the flower of its fragrance and lustre. I would not have the non-Brahmans to rise on the ruin of the Brahmans. I would rather that they rose to the height that the Brahmans have occupied before now. Brahmans are born not so Brahmanism. It is a quality open to be cultivated by the lowliest or the lowest among us”.<sup>29</sup> While addressing a public meeting in Cuddalore he appealed to the non-Brahmans not to create a new class of untouchables by hating the Brahmans who were the repositories of Hinduism. He also entreated them not to wreck in their impatience the *varnashrama* which was the bed-rock of Hinduism.<sup>30</sup>

There were criticisms from many quarters about Gandhiji’s enunciation of *varnashrama*. Even Kalyanasundara Mudaliar and R.K. Shanmukham Chetty objected to his pronouncements. The bitterest comment came, of course, from Naicker who said that in Tamil Nad if a Sudra followed Gandhiji’s advice, “he would end up only in serving the Brahmans”. It would appear that Naicker and Ramanathan met Gandhiji in September 1927 to tell him that his statements on *varnashrama dharma* would serve to perpetuate the two evils of untouchability and child marriage against which he himself was fighting. The meeting was a failure and Naicker left after giving Gandhiji a bit of his mind: India’s independence would be achieved only “with destruction of the Indian National Congress, Hinduism and Brahmanism”.<sup>\*31</sup>

This was the last of the three contributing factors—the other two being the *Gurukulam* controversy and the happenings of the Conjeevaram Provincial Conference—which caused Naicker to break away from the Congress. He emerged thereafter as a revolutionary social reformer. He formed an organisation of his own—the Self Respect League. Its avowed objective was to eliminate Brahmans and Brahman influence in Tamil Nad. The League wanted to secede from India and to form the “Dravidastan”. The

\* Yet on 30 January 1948, after the assassination Gandhiji when Naicker was invited by the AIR, Madras to speak, he said, India should be called “Gandhi Nadu” (Private Interview with M. Bhaktavatsalam, ex-chief Minister of Madras on 18 May 1984).

Tamil daily *Dravidan* and the Tamil weekly *Kudi Arasu* were the official organs of the Self Respect Movement. Naicker, who never believed in mending, announced that all social and religious reforms had failed and were doomed to fail. Therefore, what could not be mended must be ended. As T.K. Pavalar, a prominent non-Brahman leader put it: "It is not the creeds and dogmas, myths and superstitions, priestcraft and witchcraft only that he (Naicker) is fighting against. He cannot, consistent with his principles, stop with them. Religion, culture and fine arts are the props of the present system. Therefore demolish them, remove them root and branch—this is the chorus of his songs and the great commandant of his religion. . . . ."

Nobody could dispute the substantial contribution of Naicker to the national awakening on the defects of the caste system. Nor could it be denied that critics of Hinduism like Naicker had been in existence right from the Vedic age. But what made his philosophy despicable was the rough and crude manners in which he propagated it. Naicker's movement, which in later years became vehemently anti-God and anti-religion, forms an altogether different theme, which is outside the scope of this work.

It was a pity that Naicker, who had great admiration and regard for Gandhiji and who believed implicitly in the Congress policy of non-co-operation with the British Government, turned rabidly anti-Congress at a most crucial hour when that national body was launching the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930.



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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

# Civil Disobedience Movement

Viceroy Irwin declared on 31 October 1929 that the goal of the British policy was to confer Dominion Status on India and that the British Government would soon hold a Round Table Conference with Indian leaders in London to discuss the political future of India. This weighty viceregal pronouncement obliged the senior leaders of the Congress, including Gandhiji, to re-examine their earlier decision reached at the Calcutta Congress in December 1928. It was to the effect that if Dominion Status was not bestowed upon India within a year, an agitation for *Purna Swaraj* ("Complete Independence") would be mounted against the British Government.

Consequent upon the Viceregal declaration, the leaders of all parties met at Delhi on 1 and 2 November 1929 under the lead of Gandhiji and issued the All-Parties' Manifesto. Appreciating the sincerity underlying the Viceroy's declaration, the Manifesto stated clearly that two things were a vital necessity for the success of the proposed Round Table Conference: (1) a general amnesty to political prisoners; and (2) representation of progressive political organisations on the Conference with the Congress, the largest among them, having predominant representation. It further stated that the leaders were participating in the Conference on the understanding that it was meeting "not to discuss when Dominion Status is to be established but to frame a scheme of Dominion Status for India".<sup>1</sup> The signatories to the Manifesto included Annie Besant, A. Rangaswamy Iyengar, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and G.A. Natesan.

But a subsequent meeting between Irwin and Gandhiji revealed that the Dominion Status contemplated by the Viceroy's pronouncement might be as "indefinite and illusory as the 'responsible government' of 1919". There was, therefore, no question of the Congress attending the Round Table Conference. As Gandhiji said, "India's due would not come from London but would come



from Indians themselves".<sup>2</sup> At the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress, in December 1929, Gandhiji brought a motion which changed the creed of the Congress to "*Swaraj*, meaning Complete Independence". The British Government was charged with denying India her freedom and ruining it "economically, politically, culturally and spiritually". India must, therefore, sever her connection with Britain and obtain *purna swaraj* or Complete Independence. The way to *Swaraj* was not through violence, but through civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes.

On 15 February 1930, the Congress Working Committee meeting at Ahmedabad, authorised Gandhiji to launch a non-violent Civil Disobedience Movement. On 3 March 1930, Gandhiji sent an ultimatum to Irwin through an English friend of his, Reginald Reynold, living in his *ashram*. But the Government's repressive campaign had anticipated Gandhiji's civil disobedience. The first victim was Vallabhbhai Patel who was arrested on 7 March for disobeying the prohibitory order and addressing a public meeting. He was sentenced to 3 months' imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 500.

The Civil Disobedience Movement began on the issue of salt tax. Tax on a commodity like salt constituted the "most inhuman poll tax the ingenuity of man can devise" said Gandhiji who was determined to attack this "nefarious monopoly".<sup>3</sup> On 12 March he began his march to Dandi with a band of followers to break the salt law. The British Government tried to kill this campaign by a novel method this time. The British press was instructed to maintain silence over the happenings which excited the whole world. They imagined that if British newspapers ceased starring "Gandhi's antics his anti-British campaign would fall out and peter out". But it proved a self-denying ordinance which they imposed on themselves, not realising the circulation value of long and sensational "news" items. The Government imposed a ban on Gandhi films too. The cinema films depicting his Salt March to Dandi were proscribed. On 28 March the Madras Legislative Council tabled an adjournment motion against this utterly indefensible act. It was carried by a majority of one vote.<sup>4</sup>

Foreign countries particularly those in America, Europe and Far East evinced phenomenal interest in this campaign waged throughout India. Of course, the British bureaucrats tried to explain away world opinion. While they accepted that Gandhiji was entitled to world esteem, they blamed him for having begun a lawless campaign just at the psychological moment when Great

Britain was engaged in enlarging the liberties of the people of India.<sup>5</sup>

### *Salt Satyagraha in Madras:*

In the beginning, the Congress leaders of the Madras Presidency gave only a lukewarm support to civil disobedience. Though they did not oppose the decision of the Working Committee to launch the Movement as vigorously as they did in the early days of the Non-Co-operation Movement in 1920, they were very unhappy over the decision. There were even mild protests from some members of the Legislative Council. Anticipating the elections either towards the close of 1929 or early 1930, S. Srinivasa Iyengar, Rajaji and other prominent Congressmen were strenuously campaigning against the Justice and Independent parties. They, therefore, resented the decision of the Congress. "Many local Congressmen continue to find it difficult to reconcile a personal unwillingness to boycott the legislatures with loyalty to the Congress mandate to do so", reported the Chief Secretary to the Madras Government.<sup>6</sup> *The Hindu* also did not initially welcome the decision and expressed strong misgivings about the success of such a comprehensive movement.

However, as in 1920, now also the Madras Nationalists were won over by Gandhiji. And once they joined the campaign, they became fully committed to the nationalist objectives. The civil resisters resourcefully channelled the general discontent of the public caused by the worst ever depression of the early 1930s into the mainstream of the Movement. This was proof of their earnestness in pursuing the Gandhian struggle for freedom. *The Hindu* and other nationalist organs also treated the Congress campaign of civil disobedience as a national war against the alien Government. They repeatedly warned the Government against the persecution of those who would even lay down their lives in the cause of their motherland. In the words of journalist Margarita Barns: ". . . . . never before had the press played so important a part in the national campaign . . . . . enthusiasm was kindled and maintained by the vigorous action of the nationalist newspapers . . . . . Indeed all the methods which a nationalist press might be expected to use in a country were employed by the journals supporting the Movement".<sup>7</sup>

The Tamil and Andhra Provincial Congress Committees began the campaign in the district centres. Apart from the usual methods of



processions, mass-meetings, *hartals*, singing of national songs and so forth in defiance of the prohibitory orders, the civil disobedience had some special features like the salt satyagraha, agitation for temperance and boycott of foreign textile shops. The salt satyagraha which was the first item on the civil disobedience agenda consisted in making efforts to produce contraband salt in the coastal areas of the Presidency. And it proved a great success much to the annoyance of the Government.

The energetic and patriotic call of veteran leaders like T. Prakasam and K. Nageswara Rao for the salt satyagraha had a tremendous response. Since Gandhiji had permitted expansion of the originally restricted campaign, many among the younger generation also had enrolled themselves as volunteers. On the forenoon of 13 April 1930 which was the Tamil New Year day, these leaders led a band of enthusiastic volunteers who broke the Salt Law in the Triplicane Beach. This was followed by a public meeting where the speakers demanded the repeal of the "unholy, unjust and oppressive" tax imposed on a commodity so essential to both men and cattle and which was a free gift of nature.<sup>8</sup> After boiling sea water on the beach first, the same afternoon Prakasam produced salt at his residence. The Police raided his house, seized both the salt manufactured there and the utensils of manufacture. Prakasam was arrested under Section 55 of the Madras Salt Act but was released immediately. In the evening there was a procession and the leaders carried home a small quantity of salt which they had produced by the process of boiling. They met with no obstruction on their way. This was followed by a public meeting at the High Court Beach attended by about 6000 people.<sup>9</sup>

On the morning of 15 April, Prakasam organised a *hartal* to protest against the arrest of Jawaharlal Nehru. The meeting that followed the *hartal* was attended by about 10,000 people<sup>10</sup>. In the evening both Prakasam and Nageswara Rao who led the salt satyagrahis were arrested for violation of the provisions of the Salt Act.<sup>11</sup> But the happenings thereafter baffled everyone. The authorities, who arrested them for violation of the Salt Law, did not proceed with their prosecution for a breach of the Salt Act. The breakers of the Salt Law were charged with having been members of an unlawful assembly whose object was "to commit the very offence for which the departmental authorities had decided not to prosecute them on the previous day." The two leaders were now prosecuted under Section 145 of the IPC and sentenced to a heavy

fine of Rs.500 each.<sup>12</sup> On their refusal to pay the penalty, two motor cars of Prakasam and Nageswara Rao were attached by the Police and were auctioned on the evening of 16 April.<sup>13</sup> The whole Presidency was rudely shocked by the news of the monstrous sentence inflicted on the Andhra patriots. It attracted strong protests in the nationalist press.

The police action in a way stimulated public interest and helped the satyagrahis to keep alive a sense of confrontation with the British. Donations began pouring in from the Gujarati and Marwari merchants in the city who became sympathetic towards the Movement. Two merchants of Madras, dealers in chemicals and dyes, placed at Prakasam's disposal a handsome motor car to pursue his activities.<sup>14</sup> Nageswara Rao, Gadde Rangaiah Naidu and P.S. Bhashyam Chetty — well known Congressmen — were also harassed by the Police for the offence of having been members of an unlawful assembly and committed a breach of the Salt Law on 20 April. The police refused to listen to their explanation that they participated only in the procession and not in the Salt satyagraha as on that day women volunteers performed the satyagraha. Many of the satyagrahis were beaten on this occasion.<sup>15</sup> Nageswara Rao was arrested.

In protest against Nageswara Rao's arrest, a *hartal* was held on 22 April which resulted in heavy clashes between the police and the demonstrators. The following day Prakasam was arrested but that did not check the agitation which had "acquired a macabre momentum of its own". The *Sutandira Sangu* wrote: "Those who defy the Salt Act may be imprisoned or fined as per the rules laid down in the Salt Act. But the Salt Act does not say that horses should be made to trample upon the people: nor is it laid down in it that the volunteers should be beaten like dogs as they were beaten on the Beach Road on Friday morning".<sup>16</sup>

Manufacture of salt by boiling sea water was attempted at several parts of the beach. But the police acted violently everywhere barring the San Thome Beach where they broke only the pots in which the water was boiling and spared the heads of satyagrahis.<sup>17</sup>

On 27 April there was an All Parties' Conference held at the Madras Beach to condemn the brutal treatment of satyagrahis by the police on 22 April. But the police behaviour on this evening proved even worse. The deplorable incidents on 27 April exposed the truculent temper of the police at its worst. It was transparent that the Government was out to deny the public the exercise of their



normal political and civic rights including the right to hold public meetings. This was a meeting organised to express their resentment against the repressive policy of the Government and particularly the police for beating the satyagrahis on 22 April. Instead of receiving any redressal, the meeting only served to further provoke the authorities to indulge in a display of force. Buses containing armed police and mounted sowars followed the police which fell on the unarmed crowd and began an indiscriminate lathi charge. They then resorted to shooting in which two innocent lives were lost not to mention the untold misery caused to innumerable citizens.<sup>18</sup>

The *Panchayatdars* who held the inquest over the two victims of the police shooting did not stop with the submission of the report. They placated the police with an unsolicited testimonial of their conduct. The Anglo-Indian press upheld this verdict as a complete vindication of the conduct of the police.<sup>19</sup> The Madras Mahajana Sabha which conducted its own investigation found that the police were to be blamed for all the incidents between 22 and 27 April. The City Municipal Corporation passed a strongly worded resolution condemning the police action and demanded an immediate, independent and impartial enquiry. Opposing the motion, F.E. James argued that the Police Commissioner had unfettered discretion to order wholesale arrests or to use force to disperse the crowds. Such irresponsible statements only served to arouse public sentiments to a dangerous pitch.

Politicians of all shades of opinion demanded an enquiry into the shooting incident on 27 April. The public appealed to the Governor. Strangely enough, Governor Stanley promptly sent for the prominent leaders in Madras and also agreed to receive a deputation of Advocates at Ootacamund to discuss the untoward occurrences in the City when force and fire arms were freely used.<sup>20</sup> But the Governor's goodwill ended here. He disappointed the public by his refusal to listen to their practically unanimous voice to order an enquiry into the untoward incidents. There was every need for such an enquiry as the conclusions in the official report were at variance with the results of the enquiries, statements and contentions put forward by the Advocates' deputation. An impartial and independent enquiry to get at the correct version was demanded both in the interests of the Government and the public for future guidance. It was pointed out that even Willingdon ordered an enquiry in connection with the Labour strike in 1921 by a Judge of

the High Court and two other non-officials. But Governor Stanley turned it down on the extraordinary plea that ordering of such an enquiry would be “construed as a censure on the police”.<sup>21</sup>

The Salt Law was definitely broken in the Telugu districts of East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Vizagapatam and Nellore; in almost all the Tamil districts; and the other districts of the Presidency like Ganjam and South Canara. It was done either by the manufacture of salt by boiling sea water or by the collection of natural salt.<sup>22</sup> In Anantapur, North Arcot and Bellary, the contraband salt had been auctioned. In West Godavari, the satyagrahis collected six maunds of salt from swamps near Bhimavaram which had escaped the destructive activities of the Salt Depot. But the police threw it all into the canal.<sup>23</sup> The prominent Andhra leaders who were the victims of police repression in different parts of the Presidency for breach of the Salt Law were Pattabhi Sitaramayya, veteran leader and editor of *Janmabhoomi*, Bulusu Sambamurti, member of the Congress Working Committee, Atmakuri Govindacharlu, editor of *Satyagrahi* and Konda Venkata-payya.

This Movement was generally marked by non-violence and sullenness. But the repressive measures of the Government stoked it into a conflagration in many places. There were mass risings in Coimbatore, Kumarapalayam, Arcot, Vellore, Gudiyattam, Sholingur and Tindivanam. In East Godavari, considered to be a “particularly difficult district to handle”, there were police beatings and lathi charges in several places. It was a painful revelation that coercion by authorities included, among other things, physical intimidation and chastisement of the “immature students and educated unemployed”. The bureaucrats believed that the bulk of the Congress volunteers were recruited from these two groups.<sup>24</sup> The use of force was justified by the administration as a deterrent.

The following statement of an Englishman will testify to the highly irresponsible manner in which the Government handled the situation: “. . . . . the Government, far from calling for an enquiry, issued Cunningham’s account of the week’s incidents, purged of some of its more provocative remarks—as press *communiqué*, generously rewarded the policemen who had taken part, and promoted Cunningham to the post of Inspector General of Police with responsibility for combating civil disobedience throughout the Presidency”.<sup>25</sup>



*March to Vedarannyam.\**

In the 1930s also as in the 1920s, Tamil Nad politics was in a state of confusion but with a difference. Whereas in 1922–25, there was a scramble for places on the TNCC, in 1929–30, the leading Swarajists surrendered their positions on the Tamil Nad Congress Committee. S. Srinivasa Iyengar had resigned as President of the TNCC in September 1929 and quit the Congress itself after the Lahore session. His successor C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar also resigned in March 1930. Rajaji, therefore, was the obvious choice for the High office. His lieutenant T.S.S. Rajan resumed his old position as Secretary. The party headquarters was shifted from Madras to Trichinopoly. As President of the TNCC, Rajaji came to the forefront in the politics of Madras now. He had for over a decade sacrificed his all in the service of his country and had become one of the foremost lieutenants of Mahatma Gandhi.

Rajaji chose Vedarannyam, south of the *Cauveri* delta, as the chief centre of operations for his salt satyagraha. He planned the Satyagraha March much more cautiously than did his Andhra counterparts. The moment Gandhiji began his Dandi March on 12 March 1930, Rajaji undertook a tour of all districts in Tamil Nad and addressed several public meetings as a prelude to organising his proposed march to Vedarannyam. It was decided to scrap salt at Vedarannyam from the adjoining swamps. Rajaji also sent an appeal for funds and volunteers which had a tremendous response. He needed a sum of Rs. 20,000, which he was able to raise through his lieutenants in Madras, the Saurashtrians in Madura and the South Indians in Bombay and Ahmedabad.

Having decided the day of his march, he sent an advance party not only to arrange for accommodation and supplies at suitable halts, but also to rouse public sympathy in those areas. T.S.S. Rajan, Secretary, TNCC and Rukmani Lakshmipati, President, Madras League of Youth, constituted the moving spirit behind the entire campaign. They faced tough resistance only in Tanjore. The district authorities were greatly perturbed when the news of the campaign came to be known. The reason was the Government which had issued no instructions as to how to deal with the situation, had, on the other hand, ordered that Rajaji should

\* *Veda Arannyam* ("Forest of the Vedas"). It is also known as *Tiru Maraikkadu*—which is the Tamil parlance of *Vedarannyam*.

not be arrested until he actually broke the Salt Law.<sup>26</sup>

The District Magistrate A.J. Thorne was determined to obstruct, if not to prevent, the march to Vedarannyam. This European bureaucrat wanted to distinguish himself by attempting to stem the popular support to salt satyagraha. He issued two circulars—one threatening action against those who harboured satyagrahis; and the other warning those who helped or co-operated with the satyagrahis in any way, with prosecution under Section 157 of the IPC. He wanted to break the time honoured Indian tradition of hospitality for which Tanjore, reputed as the granary of the south, was most noted. Thorne said “this gathering (of satyagrahis) includes men belonging to the other districts. With their object, which is to violate the Law, the people of Tanjore have no sympathy. There is no reason why persons from other districts should come to this district, break the Law and cause trouble to the people of this district. Therefore, it is the duty of every one to discourage this band and withhold from them money, supplies and other help”.<sup>27</sup> *The Hindu* called it “preposterous” to treat the satyagrahis as an unlawful assembly before they had broken the Salt Law.<sup>28</sup> Thorne’s endeavours to arrest Rajaji on his entry into Tanjore did not fructify as the Government of Madras refused him permission to do so.<sup>29</sup>

The *padayatra* of the Salt satyagrahis was to be from Trichinopoly to Vedarannyam on the sea coast through Tanjore. Rajaji had chosen 100 satyagrahis after carefully scrutinising 300 applications received from Madras, Madura, Tinneveli, Ramnad and Salem. Led by Rajaji this picked band of 100 satyagrahis left the Grand Anaicut on 13 April 1930—the Tamil New Year Day.<sup>30</sup> They chanted along their march, the following refrain (in Tamil) of Ramalingam Pillai better known to fame as the Namakkal *Kavignar* (“Poet of Namakkal”):

A war is ahead *sans* sword, *sans* bloodshed.  
All ye who pin your faith  
In the eternity of Truth  
Join this march.

An enraptured Rajaji declared that the void left by Bharati had been more than filled by the contemporary poet.

At Koviladi the satyagrahis found the famous inn barred and bolted against them. Least discomfited by this, Rajaji and his band found alternative accommodation. Rajaji stayed in a private house,



while the party made themselves comfortable on the river bed.<sup>31</sup> In the early stages of the march, two Satyagrahis — V. Pantulu Iyer, ex MLC, and a *mirasdar*, both hailing from Tanjore, were arrested and convicted. Thorne's tactics ended here. At Tiruvaiyar, Tanjore, Kumbakonam and all other towns upto Vedarannyam, the satyagrahis received a grand welcome despite the fiat issued by Thorne. Rajaji himself told the press that the masses were responding to the call in a manner that even the most optimistic among the satyagrahis had not expected.<sup>32</sup>

The response the Satyagrahis had at Vedarannyam where they arrived on 30 April and the attitude of the police and the magistracy there, furnished a "refreshing contrast to the happenings in the city".<sup>33</sup> Rajaji selected twelve out of the hundred volunteers to break the salt law on the morning of 1 May at Agastianpalli under his leadership. They collected the salt from the salt swamp and waited for a while. The police there under D.S.P. Govindan Nair did not seek to disperse the peaceful satyagrahis by administering lathi charges. They attempted to seize the contraband salt in the possession of the satyagrahis and to disperse them by the promulgation of an order under Section 127. On their refusal to disperse and to part with the contraband commodity, the police arrested their leader forthwith and took him into custody for trial. Thereupon, the satyagrahis walked away peacefully with the salt they had scrapped.<sup>34</sup> Violence was never used at any stage.

Rajaji who pleaded guilty was convicted by the Magistrate under Section 145 of the IPC read with Section 74 of the Salt Act. He was sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 200 with 3 months' additional imprisonment in default of payment of the fine. He was treated by the police with all politeness due to an illustrious patriot. Still, the whole country keenly felt the incarceration of one who had dedicated his life to the uplift of his country men.<sup>35</sup>

After his arrest, other leaders who accompanied him attempted to continue the satyagraha. Everyday, batches of volunteers broke the salt law, occasionally managing to bring back the salt to the camp. The commodity brought was kept in the open for drying and one day the Police carried out a raid and confiscated the salt. The satyagrahis then arranged for public meetings which were addressed by their leaders. On 9 May, an order was issued banning meetings and prohibiting assemblage of more than five people. Undeterred, the volunteers started going in twos to explain to the

people the state of affairs.<sup>36</sup> Thereafter, the authorities resorted to the arrest of the satyagrahis including K. Santanam and Vedaratnam Pillai. Evenso, manufacture of salt in defiance of the law continued and it became almost impossible for the police to prevent this in view of the natural salt pans in Vedarannyam. The number of the satyagrahis also began to swell and by the middle of May it was 200. T.S.S. Rajan supplied funds for their maintenance. On 29 May police raided their camp a second time and arrested 135 volunteers including T.S.S. Rajan and Rukmani Lakshmipati. In order to prevent any attempt to revive it, the police demolished the camp of the Satyagrahis.<sup>37</sup>

K. Kamaraj Nadar of Virudunagar was also a civil resister. An active worker from his boyhood, he was destined to become a foremost Congress leader in the Presidency and attain all India stature in the post-independent era. He was sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

#### *Women on the March:*

The trial and conviction of Rukmani Lakshmipati may be said to have marked the emergence of a new phase in the salt satyagraha.<sup>38</sup> Of course, hundreds of women had already entered the agitation—a feature which distinguished the Civil Disobedience Movement from all the previous political struggles undertaken by the Congress. In a country where the fair sex constituted half the total population, women's entry into the Movement testified to the strength of their patriotism. Rukmani Lakshmipati was the first woman to pay the penalty attached to a violation of the Salt Law. The incarceration of a lady of her calibre, capacity and culture, not to speak of her integrity and intrepidity, moved popular imagination powerfully.

The Andhra women were not a whit behind their Tamil sisters in exhibiting their prowess. They had joined the Satyagraha even by the beginning of April. There was a good response to the call of Vedantam Kamala Devi who invited her sisters to participate in the salt satyagraha.<sup>39</sup> Janaki Devi of Sibiram was perhaps one of the worst sufferers in this satyagraha. After dispensing by force the 19 salt satyagrahis at the town of Sibiram in Vizagapatam in June 1931, the police occupied the town and seized the properties which were under the lawful custody of Janaki Devi who was the "Dictator" of the volunteers then. They also seized and destroyed the



National Flag. About fifty days after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, all the properties seized were auctioned without any sale notification; without any information either to her or to any other Congress leader; and without any regard to the market value of the articles. The sale proceeds were credited to the Government. When Janaki Devi wrote to the District Magistrate seeking the restoration of the properties, he questioned her very right to do so. Ultimately, after the intervention of the Home Secretary Emerson, at the request of Vallabhbhai Patel, a paltry sum of Rs. 37 was returned to Janaki Devi as the amount realised.

Apart from being salt satyagrahis and suffering the police torture, the women of the Presidency also organised public meetings, notable one being that held under the auspices of the Women's Indian Association. A resolution calling upon the authorities to confer on India a constitution based on Dominion Status, was adopted here. Even the Government could not help noting that the feminine element was conspicuous during this Movement.<sup>40</sup>

Rajaji was released from the Bellary Jail in October 1930. He was in Jail only for 5 months and 11 days. But his activities thereafter speedily became so pronounced that proceedings under Section 107 of the Criminal Procedure Code were instituted against him on 24 October. He was recommitted to jail for one year on his refusal to furnish the security ordered.

The Salt Satyagraha in Vedarannyam as elsewhere in India, was a tremendous moral success. The absurdity of the Salt Act itself, the fear the proposed march evoked in the minds of the British bureaucrats and the relatively peaceful march to Vedarannyam attest to both the spirit and the non-violent discipline of nationalism that were in evidence in the Presidency during this period.

The Movement assumed different forms in different places and the Congress did its best to utilise the hostility of the people towards the Government. It was already pointed out that there was an unprecedented depression during this period which threatened to subvert the social and economic equilibrium of the Presidency. This operated greatly to the advantage of the civil resisters. Both rich and poor came to their support. Opulent land lords and leading traders, particularly those whose products suffered a great set back by the price-fall, offered huge funds to the Congress to carry on the Movement. The Rice Mill Owners' Association of Guntur, Masulipatam Grain Merchants' Association, Reddy Gram Traders of Nellore and the cotton merchants of Bezwada took the lead

in lending financial support.<sup>41</sup> Agricultural masses living under strained conditions were only too willing to extend their co-operation to the Congress in their campaign. For instance, at the time of the peasants' riots in Coimbatore in 1931, there were about 10,000 unemployed weavers; these men, along with the cotton merchants of the city, fuelled the civil disobedience in Coimbatore and Kumpalayam.<sup>42</sup>

The Districts of Madura and Krishna were in the forefront in the temperance campaign also. The Kamma Agriculturists of Krishna and the Saurashtra merchants of Madura took a leading part in the war against liquor. They organised boycotts of the Government's auction of licences for liquor trading. Some liquor shops were burnt and some toddy-palms vandalised.<sup>43</sup> In Madura, the campaign was organised by N.M.R. Subbaraman, a very wealthy congressman.<sup>44</sup> In Ramnad, the Nadars came in large numbers to wage the war against the British. This gesture on their part disproved the myth of their loyalty to the British.<sup>45</sup> Kamaraj Nadar was also a leading organiser of this agitation. The Nadars fought for temple entry also during this agitation.

#### *Government's reprisal:*

The greater the force of the Movement, the more vehement became the Governor and the lesser dignitaries in dealing with the satyagrahis for their open breaches of law. The Government of Madras resorted to proscribing the Andhra Provincial Congress Committee as an unlawful association under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908. This was a step of the utmost gravity ever adopted by any Government in India. The APCC was a provincial body representing the Indian National Congress, the parent and fountainhead of all public and political life in this country. It was, therefore, most improper to invoke the sweeping provisions of Act XIV of 1908 to proclaim an entire provincial association an unlawful body and to declare all its members, irrespective of their opinions and actions, offenders. The Government also demanded a security from the *Swarajya* and the *Andhra Patrika*.<sup>46</sup>

The various methods adopted by the district officials to combat the civil disobedience in various places may be reviewed briefly. They resorted to wholesale arrests when there was the least provocation for it as in the case of the volunteers at Udayavanam.



All the 31 volunteers along with their “Dictator” E. Krishna Iyer camping at Udayavanam, were arrested on the morning of 18 June when they were in the midst of the flag salutation ceremony—the first item in their daily routine. E. Krishna Iyer, a lawyer by profession and an artiste by temperament, said in a statement: “. . . . . I could not resist the call of my country at this juncture. . . I have done my duty to the best of my ability. . . . I appeal to all young men to continue the struggle unflinchingly”.<sup>47</sup> Satyamurti was also arrested and sentenced to six months’ imprisonment for having attempted to salute the National Flag in contravention of the Police Order prohibiting the act in certain places in the city. This was the first arrest of Satyamurti.<sup>48</sup>

Another method of repression was issuing orders threatening local bodies with punitive action if they encouraged the satyagraha. This was because in some districts the local bodies supported the Movement and wished it success. The action of the Government was in contravention of their own orders issued only a few months earlier. As per these orders, the ban on Bharati songs was removed; the local and Municipal authorities were authorised to permit the singing of national songs in schools; and *Khadar* and hand-spinning were encouraged. Co-operative societies were threatened with drastic action for giving a fillip to *Khadar* and *Swadeshi* activities.<sup>49</sup>

The most unjustifiable methods of repression were the ones reported from Guntur and Krishna districts. They were countenanced by the Governor himself. The atrocities were perpetrated “in the name of law and order under the ever accommodating section of the Criminal Procedure Code—section 144”. The absurd orders were: prohibition of *Takli* processions when people went in procession spinning hand *taklis*; singing of national songs; and wearing of Gandhi caps. It was a pity that the Madras Government did not remember what happened in Sholapur when a similar order was imposed only a month earlier. The Secretary of State for India intervened to cancel it. The *Manchester Guardian* commented on the order thus: “If we were asked what is the most surprising news recently received from India, we would report: ‘Reuter’s telegram of Wednesday from Sholapur stating that lorry loads of British soldiers are parading the streets armed with thin sticks with a hook at the end with which they lift the Gandhi caps worn by passers-by, this being considered provocative’”.<sup>50</sup> Refusing to learn from the experience of other provinces, the Government of Madras renewed its hunt for Gandhi caps and their wearers. It

issued orders from Ootacamund in July 1930, forbidding even prisoners, who were entitled to put on their own dress, from sporting the Gandhi cap.<sup>51</sup>

In Rajamundry, a Committee of Lawyers about to take the evidence in a certain case, was declared by the Police Inspector as an unlawful assembly liable to dispersal. It was alleged that recording of evidence of witnesses as to police excesses would encourage civil disobedience.<sup>52</sup> Much more objectionable was the act of the District Magistrate of Guntur. He sent an official communication to the Municipal Councillors of Guntur censuring them for not promptly voting for the cancellation of their resolution to fly the national flag on the Municipal premises. Since the Congress organisations in the District had been declared unlawful, the Councillors, the order said, became liable to prosecution under the Act of 1908. It was pointed out that “the flying of the white, red and green flag over the Municipal Office is one form of assistance to the operations of that association”.<sup>53</sup>

The crusade against *Khadar* provoked the little boys of the Hindu High School in Triplicane to carry on a “Gandhi cap” demonstration.<sup>54</sup> Even juvenile satyagrahis were not spared by the autocratic Government. They were not shown an atom of mercy by the stone-hearted Magistracy. A very large number of boys were badly treated by the Magistracy throughout the Presidency. The boys were later confined to Borstal institutions at Tanjore and other places for two or more years. The sufferings of the Orunganty Venkata Subbiahs provide the best illustration of the erratic manner in which the sentences were given by the Magistracy and the prisoners classified for treatment in jails. Venkata Subbiah of Nellore was the father of a child satyagrahi and was sentenced to 3 months’ simple imprisonment for disobedience! The mother was sentenced to 6 months’ imprisonment! The boy satyagrahi Orunganty Ramachandrayya was sentenced to be detained in the Borstal school for two years. It was a “perversion and travesty of the scope and purpose of the Borstal Schools Act to interpret the breaches of law on the part of these youths, committed under a sense of political and patriotic fervour, as of a character that would require them being kept in a corrective Borstal institution for a number of years. . . . .” Fortunately, in the case of 3 other juvenile satyagrahis of Nellore, the Appellate Court rightly intervened and rectified what would have been a gross injustice.<sup>55</sup>



There were occasions when the despotic Magistracy introduced panicky measures anticipating calamitous situations. Foreseeing an agitation over the arrest of Jawaharlal Nehru in October 1930, the Chief Presidency Magistrate of Madras brought in certain precautionary measures which were absolutely uncalled for. Jawaharlal Nehru who was released after the expiry of his sentence in the middle of October, was re-arrested on 25 October 1930 on a charge of sedition in Allahabad. He was sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment on 29 October 1930. This period also marked the opening of the first Round Table Conference in London without the Congress being represented on it. This was also expected to bring disquiet. The Judicial Officer forestalled the agitators by passing an order prohibiting political demonstrations in Madras.<sup>56</sup> Even more fantastic was the behaviour of the Sub Divisional Magistrate of Cuddalore. He decreed that for the following two months nobody should participate in any procession or demonstration or convene or participate in any of the political meetings or gatherings within the Cuddalore Taluk.<sup>57</sup>

Instances of oppression, as well as misuse and even violation of the provisions of law on the part of the officials entrusted with putting down the Movement were frequently brought to the notice of the Governor. The Southern India Chamber of Commerce, for instance, notified their sense of strong resentment on the use of violence by the police on congressmen carrying on peaceful picketing of foreign cloth establishments and the lathi charges on peaceful citizens.<sup>58</sup> The nationalist papers had been strongly warning the Government against embarking on a policy of repression. The public had often demanded an enquiry into the alleged police excesses on the satyagrahis. The Governor's attention was particularly drawn to the improper penalties imposed on the satyagrahis by the Magistracy at the instance of the police. But nothing was done by the Governor either to check such excesses or to stop abuses of power. On the other hand, his administration expected every official to muster all strength at his command, to combat civil disobedience and to promote loyalty to government. Retired officials who sympathised with civil resisters were threatened with loss of pension!<sup>59</sup>

The only redeeming feature was the gesture of goodwill shown by the High Court of Madras. When there was miscarriage of justice on account of the summary methods adopted by magistracy in

Civil Disobedience activities in the Madras Presidency during the first two quarters.\*

	Arrests	Convictions	Fines	Amount	Lathi and Cane Charge	Station Beatings	No. of volunteers Beaten	Force used otherwise
First Quarter (all districts including Madras)	2025	741	238	33010	200	39	704	43
Second Quarter (all districts including Madras)	1917	341	118	14730	136	1	625	82

\*(Gathered from Papers) O.P. Ramaswami Reddy Papers.



difficult conditions, the High Court intervened in many cases to vindicate the correct principles and procedures that should be adopted in such cases.<sup>60</sup>

The Madras government also sustained a significant defeat over an important motion in the Legislative Council on 29 January 1931. It was for a token cut to express the Council's disapproval of the police excesses in the Presidency in dealing with the Civil Disobedience Movement. The Home Member Mohammad Usman, impervious to all pleadings and censures, talked of the necessity of maintaining law and order. This was in sharp contrast to the utterances of men like Ramsay MacDonald and Wedgewood Benn. These men, in the course of the debates in the House of Commons, expressed their deep dissatisfaction over the methods adopted in India to repress the National Movement. To quote MacDonald, repression in India was "a very curious repression, a very uncomfortable repression and a kind of repression from which one shall get neither credit nor success—a great proportion of these masses being women and children".<sup>61</sup>

#### *Agitation called off: Not in Madras:*

It was already stated that the Congress declined to participate in the first Round Table Conference and that this was exercising the mind of the public. Many Congress leaders were clapped in prison. All the same, the Conference took place in London from 12 November 1930 to 19 January 1931. The 89\* members who attended it consisted of "a motley crowd of reactionaries, communalists who had distinguished themselves enough to win titles, Liberals, minority interests and a few who called themselves progressives".<sup>62</sup>

Addressing the concluding session of the Round Table Conference on 19 January, the British Premier Ramsay MacDonald made a statement announcing the altered policy of the Government. Though the declaration did not meet in full the terms of the national demand, it did convey that His Majesty's Government had accepted the principle of "full responsible Government for India with transitional safeguards". Rumours of a political amnesty were thick in the air. These proved true, for Gandhiji and some other Congress men were released unconditionally on the morning of 26 January 1931.

\* 16 from the three British Political parties; 16 from the Indian States; and 57 from British India.

Gandhiji's release was followed by a series of interviews between him and Irwin commencing from 17 February 1931. Both men were impressed with each other during these talks which marked a historic milestone in India's freedom struggle. The resourceful viceroy used his persuasive power to get Gandhiji participate in the Second Round Table Conference. He wanted the Civil Disobedience Movement to be given up as a sign of the new spirit. But Gandhiji would only suspend it. Ultimately, however, thanks to the last minute efforts of V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, T.B. Saprú and M.R. Jayakar, the movement was called off. The Government withdrew all repressive Ordinances.

On 4 March 1931 the famous Gandhi-Irwin Agreement was announced. By this the Congress agreed to call off the Civil Disobedience Movement, stop boycott of British goods and participate in the Second Round Table Conference. The Viceroy agreed to withdraw Ordinances issued in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement, declare an amnesty for political prisoners and return the property confiscated during the Movement. The right to manufacture salt and to picket liquor shops was granted.

Despite the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement at the All-India level as a sequel to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, the Movement did not subside in the Madras Presidency. They were actually on the increase in the early days of 1931, thanks to Rajaji. On 28 January Rajaji and Pattabhi Sitaramayya were released. Deeply dissatisfied with the announcement of Ramsay MacDonald, the two leaders minced no words in telling their audience: there could be no question of safeguards as they would destroy the substance of self-government; the excise duties must be abolished and land revenue reduced; and any resultant deficit in the revenue must be made good by Indianising the army and thus reducing military expenditure. They exhorted the Congress leaders to revive picketing of foreign cloth shops and the manufacture of salt during the "armistice" period preceding final "peace terms".<sup>63</sup>

There was a good response to this appeal of Rajaji and Sitaramayya from provincial leaders like K. Bhashyam Iyengar and Nageswara Rao. Under their lead, the agitation spread to certain areas which were hitherto dormant. At times, it also assumed disquieting proportions. The Government, for its part, added seventy five men from the Presidency Armed Reserve Police and three Platoons of the Malabar Special Police to the force already at the disposal of the Commissioner to beat the volunteers brutally.



This provoked the ire of the Piecegoods Merchants' Association. As per the decision which they took at the instance of Bhashyam Iyengar and Nageswara Rao, they closed down their shops in Godown street for a week from 16 February as a protest against alleged police excesses.<sup>64</sup>

Margaret Cousins, the well-known Irish Theosophist, joined the picketing of foreign cloth shops in Madras in March 1931. Dressed in *Khadar*, she had already toured India in September 1930, in the course of which she persistently advocated, often in a provocative language, the boycott of British goods.\* At a meeting at Nellore, in March 1931, addressing an audience of 2,500, she said that she was proud of her Irish nationality and that her sympathies were with Indian national aspirations.<sup>65</sup>

It is relevant to relate here the agitation against resettlement of land revenue in the East and West Godavari and Krishna districts which coincided with the Civil Disobedience Movement. The Madras Government adamantly insisted on implementing the resettlement proposals at a time when, owing to economic depression, there was an abnormal fall in agricultural prices which had made the condition of the agriculturists miserable. There was the least justification for any increase in the existing land revenue levy. Even the Representative Enquiry Committee appointed by the Government on the advice of the Legislative Council was unanimous in its verdict which was against any increase in the assessment. But the Committee's opinion had no effect on the decision of the Madras Government. The Legislative Council also registered its protest by an adjournment motion. But the Government persisted in its attitude and proposed courses of action.

This stance of the Government paved the way for an agitation against the intended enforcement of the resettlement proposals in January 1932. Many Congress leaders came to the rescue of the helpless agriculturists providing them guidance. It was purely an economic question but the Government politicised it. They saw in the agitation a "No-Tax campaign" but it was not so. The affected parties were willing to pay the following year's assessment in full when it fell due, provided the intended enhancement was not demanded. Since No-Tax campaigns had always scared the Government out of its wits, it planned to resort to the worst measures of

\* After entering whole-heartedly the Gandhian Movement, she opened an institution called *Gandhi Patsala* at Cocanada (Andhra).

repression in combating the agitation. On 1 November 1931, as per the appeal issued by Bapineedu, Secretary, Central Resettlement Association and Kaleswara Rao, Secretary, Provincial Congress Committee, there were protest meetings throughout the three districts. The Government attempted to crush the agitation by repression — involving the arrest and imprisonment of such popular congress leaders as Narayana Raju, Bapineedu, M. Tirumala Rao and Balarama Krishnayya Chaudhury. On 15 November 1931 Kaleswara Rao appealed to Vallabhbhai Patel, President, AICC, who in turn wrote to Emerson, Home Secretary, Government of India, giving him an account of the plight of the agriculturists and the counter measures of the Government of Madras which were excessively harsh and provocative. Patel requested Emerson to use his influence with the Madras Government and secure the postponement of the resettlement proposals. Emerson was also requested to secure the withdrawal of the cases pending against the workers and the release of those who were already imprisoned. But it hardly elicited any response. In fact while forwarding the letter of Patel to the Madras Government, Emerson remarked therein that his Government did not propose to reply to it.<sup>66</sup>

The aforesaid incidents were taking place in the Presidency after the Civil Disobedience Movement was officially called off. The Satyagrahis in the Presidency practically never ceased from picketing. Some of them occasionally indulged in violence. One Bhashyam *alias* “Arya” experimented on inflammable materials in order to set fire to big piecegoods shops like the Chellaram’s Benares Stores. He attempted to set fire to the big *godown* of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in George Town which fortunately failed narrowly. “Arya” carried a reward of Rs. 500 over his head.<sup>67</sup>



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50. 16 May 1930, quoted in *The Hindu*, 26 June 1930.
51. *The Hindu*, 18 July 1930.
52. *Ibid.*, 7 July 1930.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*, 16 Sep. 1930.
55. *Ibid.*, 26 Sep. 1930.
56. *Ibid.*, 12 Nov. 1930.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Ibid.*, 24 Jan. 1931.
59. Office Memorandum to all Govt. of India Departments, D2440, dt. 14 May 1930, cited in S. Gopal, *The Viceroyalty of Irwin*, p. 63.
60. *The Hindu*, 2 Oct. 1930.
61. *Ibid.*, 29 Jan. 1931.
62. M. Chalapati Rau, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, p. 66.
63. *Fortnightly Report*: Second Half of Jan. 1931.
64. *Ibid.*
65. "History Sheet of Margaret Cousins", *Home-Pol, D. 6279/32*.
66. Letter dt. 4 Dec. 1931, *Home-Pol. F. No. 33/45/1931*.
67. The statement of Bhashyam alias "Arya", Artist residing at Madras, *Freedom Movement File*, NAI.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# Civil Disobedience Renewed

During the interval between the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in March and the second Round Table Conference in September 1931, many things had happened in both England and India. In England, the Labour Ministry had fallen and with it, Wedgewood Ben, Secretary of State. A new National Government had been formed with Ramsay MacDonald as Premier. The new Secretary of State was Samuel Hoare, who had no "real feeling or understanding of the Indian problem", as F.W. Wilson\* put it. In India, tension continued to prevail on account of repeated breaches of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. At one stage in August 1931, the Congress Working Committee decided not to participate in the Second Round Table Conference as a protest against those breaches. However, after a meeting lasting three hours between Gandhiji and the Viceroy in September 1931, Gandhiji decided to take the trip to London.<sup>1</sup>

Gandhiji left India with a heavy heart for many reasons. The chief event that grieved him most was the execution of Bhagat Singh. Gandhiji's efforts to secure a reprieve for Bhagat Singh and two of his comrades had ended in a fiasco. All the three were executed in Lahore in March 1931 by the Government which flouted public opinion and displayed its mighty brute force.

The execution, it is pertinent to state here, had literally a theatrical echo in Tamil Nad. When a political drama was being enacted on an evening in Madras, actress Ponnammal who was also a great patriot, entered the stage singing *Bharata Singam Bhagat Singh* ("Bhagat Singh, the Lion of Bharat"). She became very emotional and swooned on the stage.<sup>2</sup> This incident attests to the degree of nationalist feelings that were aroused in the Presidency by the execution of Bhagat Singh.

Gandhiji went to London as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress. The other Indian delegates included A. Ranga-swami Iyengar, Editor of *The Hindu*. The British Government

\* Former editor of the *Pioneer*.

which selected the representatives for the Conference composed the delegation so carefully as to ensure two things: that every cleavage in the social fabric of India manifested itself to thwart any attempt at national unity which would imperil imperial hegemony over India; and that the true voice of nationalism was "lost in the cacaphony of divisive voices raised by the representatives of princely India on the one hand, and those of communitarian and religious constituencies, on the other".<sup>3</sup> In fine, the British Government failed to react to the Mahatma's call for "a statesmanlike gesture" in response to the growing spirit of nationalism in India. He made "direct homely but scorching speeches demanding independence".<sup>4</sup> Opposed as he always was to the division of the Indian people into communities, Gandhiji refused to sign the request of the delegates to the Premier inviting him to settle the Hindu-Muslim-Sikh question. He wrote to the Prime Minister explaining the reasons for his stand.<sup>5</sup> As expected, the Second Round Table Conference came to naught. A definite declaration of policy elaborating MacDonald's statement at the end of the Conference, which was most eagerly looked for, was not forthcoming. Gandhiji returned to India on 28 December 1931. His attitude towards the claims for separate representation put forward on behalf of the Depressed Classes had its repercussions in Madras. There was open manifestation of Adi-Dravida hostility to the Congress.

The year 1932 began with the Congress Working Committee resolving to resume the civil disobedience campaign. The repressive policy of the Government coupled with the unkind reply of the new Viceroy Willingdon to Gandhiji's telegram seeking an interview rendered co-operation infinitely more difficult than ever before. The Civil Disobedience Movement was therefore revived.

Even before the campaign was formally revived, the Madras Government was ready for an onslaught on the satyagrahis. Vigorous preparation for counter attack was going on even during the period of peace. The police was instructed that the motive behind the administration of lathi-charge was not merely to frighten away civil resisters but to really "break their heads". In the early hours of 4 January 1932, Gandhiji was arrested as usual "under regulation XXV of 1827 for removal of inconvenient persons without assignable reasons".<sup>6</sup> Immediately after his arrest, orders were issued under Section 144 in Madras City and important mofussil centres, prohibiting the holding of meetings and processions in sympathy with the arrest. Disobeying the orders the satyagrahis



in many parts of the Presidency, resumed picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops and organised processions and meetings. The Government thereupon promulgated Ordinances marking the commencement of an era of repression to meet the resumption of civil disobedience.

It was an unprecedented war on Congress which was a definite reversal of Irwin's policy. Undaunted, the satyagrahis went about their activities defying the Government Orders. The most daring feat of valour was performed by that patriotic young revolutionary "Arya". On 26 January 1932, which was declared Independence Day, "Arya" hoisted the Tri-colour Flag at 2 a.m. at Fort Saint George, atop a wireless pole of about 210 feet high. It was the topmost point in the whole city. "Arya" created a sensation in the city as even soldiers and policemen were afraid to climb the pole. Someone was given ten rupees by the police to dehoist the flag. On this occasion also, "Arya" eluded the police.<sup>7</sup>

Between 15 and 30 January 1932 as many as twenty two units of the Congress Organisations were declared illegal under Section 3 of the Unlawful Association Ordinance. Anticipating further Government offensive, the various Congress organisations dissolved themselves each appointing a "dictator" to carry on its activities. Many of these dictators were arrested the moment they showed any sign of furthering the National Movement. Satyamurti who was appointed as the first dictator succeeded in carrying on the work uninterruptedly for some time. He regularly picketed foreign cloth shops, conducted processions, distributed boycott leaflets and cartoons, and wrote boycott slogans on the walls and on tarred roads. These events in the city provided enough material for a full column of the daily newspapers and occasionally for a larger space.<sup>8</sup> Satyamurti was arrested for these activities in January 1932.

### *Government on The Rampage:*

There was a noticeable increase in the civil disobedience activities in the districts of Malabar, Krishna, in the town of Berhampur (Ganjam) and in the Madras City. In the "old storm centre of Gudivada" in Krishna district, meetings were conducted at an out of the way village in order to plan intermittent picketing and the preaching of boycott. Seditious pamphlets were clandestinely distributed here.<sup>9</sup> On 27 January 1932, when the Indian Franchise

Committee headed by Lothian arrived in Madras, posters bearing slogans "Lothian, Go back" and "Long Live Revolution" were pasted on the walls. Apprehending hostile demonstrations, the Government arrested 18 leaders. There was an endless array of reports from loyalists to the Government against Congress civil resisters in the Presidency. There were also complaints from the civil resisters about the misbehaviour and high-handedness of the bureaucracy in dealing with the satyagrahis.

The case which gained considerable notoriety during the second Civil Disobedience Movement was the Tellicherry *Tali* incident. The Magistrate of Tellicherry, Dodwell, behaved arrogantly towards a Hindu woman satyagrahi Kamala Bai Prabhu while trying her. He made certain highly derogatory observations from the Bench with reference to Kamala Prabhu and other women satyagrahis. He ordered the removal of Kamala Prabhu's *tali* or *mangal sutra* (wedding symbol worn round the neck) along with her other jewels to realise the fine imposed upon her.<sup>10</sup> A deputation of women consisting of Muthulakshmi Reddy, Ammu Swaminathan and others waited in deputation on the Law Member M. Krishnan Nair and urged him to take prompt action against the Magistrate. With a view to dispelling any misgivings among the public on such a sensitive issue, the Government of Madras published a *communique*<sup>11</sup> that the purport of the Magistrate's remarks about the danger of outrage on women under the existing anarchical conditions was misunderstood; and it certainly had no reference to any threat of molestation. However, few could deny that the Magistrate's observation in public was uncalled for. As for the *tali* incident, the judicial officer expressed regret for his action although it seemed the law did not prohibit the attachment of the *tali*. The Government expressed its intention to amend the rule in this respect so as to "prevent all possibility of a recurrence of so regrettable a mistake".<sup>12</sup>

The Government records were silent over the treatment meted out to Kamala Prabhu after seizing the *mangal sutra*. Actually Vakil De Cruz seemed to have told Dodwell of the sanctity of the *mangal sutra* but disregarding it, the latter asked a policeman to untie it. Again Kamala Prabhu, who was placed in "A" class during the earlier Satyagraha struggle, was now put in "C" class. An official told her if she apologised, she would be let off; if she were to be imprisoned, she would be sent to Vellore and not to the Cannanore jail where her husband was imprisoned.<sup>13</sup>



There were occasions when the Government of Madras simply denied allegations against its officials even when clarifications were sought by the Home Government. Freeman, a Member of the British Parliament who was in India in early 1932, was an eye-witness to the brutal police repression on the civil resisters. The occasion was a procession taken out by some volunteers on 26 January to celebrate the Independence Day. He cabled to the Prime Minister of Britain: "Just personally witnessed merciless hitting unaggressive, unarmed, defenceless citizens till unconscious in public thoroughfare encouraged by English officers without enquiry or trial. Such daily exhibitions in many towns disgrace British justice, law and order. Please arrange official enquiry in this case". The reply of the Madras Government to the query of the higher authorities was: "No more force was used than necessary and no one was beaten till unconscious. Volunteers often feign unconsciousness to excite public sympathy."<sup>14</sup>

Some women political arrestees were reportedly stripped and flogged by the Andhra police. The news gained the widest publicity both in India and abroad. The *Chicago Tribune* had published it. An alarmed Secretary of State sent cable after cable to know the facts. The Madras Government replied most cavalierly: "... Andhra is not the name of a place but name of Telugu half of Presidency. No such allegation had come to notice in any part of Madras and so far as known is totally without foundation".<sup>15</sup>

At the Legislative Council, the Home Member Mohammad Usman was plied with a volley of questions on this incident and many other police irregularities. His reaction to it all was one of amazing indifference and unconcern. The fact was Usman was "slow witted and easily confused in the Legislature by the jibes and interjections of the United Nationalists". So his stock reply to all queries was "the Government have no information".<sup>16</sup> The Floor leader of the Opposition R.N. Arogyaswami Mudaliar made a mild protest against such an attitude on the part of the Government and asked for protection of the Chair against police repression. The nationalist papers strongly criticised the Government's attitude. As a result there was some improvement in his replies. For, on another occasion, he admitted that the brutal beatings administered to Khasa Subba Rau\* and O.P. Ramaswami Reddy\*\* were "severe" and

\* Editor, *Swarajya*.

\*\* Omandur P. Ramaswamy Reddy; Journalist; later Chief Minister of Madras.

that an investigation was being conducted into the whole affair. They were beaten while they were picketing in front of Gianchand Chellaram Cloth Shop in Madras on 25 February.

The Law Member M. Krishnan Nair excelled his colleague in extending sympathy to political sufferers! He bluntly refused to accept the proposal to give buttermilk to class "C" political prisoners when the non-official members of the Council pleaded for it. His stereotyped answer was that that category of political prisoners were not accustomed to buttermilk!! It was painful to realise that an Indian member could remain oblivious to the invidious treatment meted out to the Indian political prisoners who were in jails not for their moral turpitude or felony but for their courage of conviction. An European bandit or murderer would get meat and milk in jail whereas an Indian political sufferer would be shut up in the same cell with a local criminal facing the gallows.<sup>17</sup>

The officialdom no doubt avowed repeatedly that the emergency powers assumed by the Government would be used sparingly and with utmost circumspection. But, in reality, it unleashed a regular reign of terror. One example of authority running riot was the raid on the Congress House at Royapettah on 13 January 1932 within twelve hours after the Gazette notification declaring it a building used for unlawful purposes. An All India Exhibition of an entirely non-political nature was housed in its premises and it was scheduled to run till 15 January. It was designed to stimulate indigenous industries. This atrocious act was committed by a Government which had declared that its intention was not to prevent the promotion of Indian Industries or to discourage *Swadeshi*.<sup>18</sup>

The worst incident during the second spell of the civil disobedience happened in Tiruppur (Coimbatore district). Defying the ban on meetings and processions, the Desabandhu Youth League of Tiruppur took out a procession of about three hundred strong on 11 January carrying national flags, singing national songs and shouting *vande mataram*. They were stopped and were ordered to disperse. On their refusal to do so, the police became brutes and administered severe lathi charge in the course of which three sustained severe injuries. One of them, O.K.S.R. Kumaraswamy Mudaliar popularly called "Tiruppur Kumaran" succumbed to his injuries on 12 January, his skull having been fractured just behind the left ear. This martyr came to be known as *Kodi Kaaththa Kumaran* ("the defender of the national flag"); he held the



flag aloft even as he was felled down by police lathis. The other two were maimed for life.<sup>19</sup> According to the Chief Secretary to the Madras Government the forcible dispersal of the unlawful assembly of which the deceased was a member was “fully justified”. The responsibility for the consequences he said “rest upon those who deliberately defied the orders passed prohibiting demonstrations in support of civil disobedience and the warning given to the unlawful assembly to disperse”.<sup>20</sup>

The Movement certainly shook the Government out of its wits. It had its jitters even at the rumour of a “No-Tax” campaign. How panicky it grew to meet the eventuality of a Congress “No-Tax” campaign could be gauged from the following lengthy telegram of the Viceroy to the Secretary of State:

“No-Tax or no-rent agitation in Madras. Madras has now announced their decision in regard to suspensions and remissions of land revenue, in regard to which they have issued a detailed *communique* dated 13 December 1933 . . . . . In addition to remitting Rs. 33 lakhs suspended at the last harvest, they have decided after consultation with their Finance Committee to grant suspensions to the extent of about Rs. 60 lakhs. Their original proposal was for suspensions to the amount of Rs. 52 lakhs and the Finance Committee recommended an enhancement of the percentages so as to involve a total of nearly Rs. 75 lakhs. Their considered opinion is that the concessions granted will satisfy reasonable public opinion. There have been no further indications of any attempt to organise a “No-Tax” campaign and Congressmen have been preoccupied with Gandhiji’s tour. Though it is uncertain into what channels Congress leaders will divert their energies, it is probable that they have abandoned the idea of an organised general “No-Tax” campaign. Though the probability of such a campaign is remote, Madras Government have submitted for sanction a Bill to be introduced, if the need arises. . . . .”<sup>21</sup> All district Magistrates were instructed to undertake propaganda work at once with a view to emphasising the generosity of the concessions.<sup>22</sup>

### *Mill Barons and Civil Disobedience:*

The Delhi Pact of 5 March 1931 entered into between Gandhiji and Irwin, contained certain clearly defined provisions about boycott and picketing of British commodities, particularly the trade in textiles. In practice, however, these provisions were openly honoured in the breach rather than in the observance. In retaliation, the Congress organised a boycott of non-Indian Mills. It was but an extension of the boycott of foreign cloth. Just as the products of the

British managed Mills in India which were not approved by the Congress were classified as "foreign", the British Textile Mills in India were categorised as foreign Mills and were put on the boycott list. And these Mills were regularly picketed. Picketing, however, ceased in the case of the Mills which signed an agreement with the Congress.

The Congress stipulated certain conditions in the agreement. The main principles which the British firms on the boycott list were required to subscribe were: (1) No person connected with the management of the Mills would engage himself in propaganda hostile to the National Movement or particularly in any activity organised voluntarily or at the instance of or on behalf of the British Government in India in opposition to the Movement; in other words, as a precondition to the removal of the boycott of their business by the Congress, the Company as a British Concern was required to pledge its own word to the Congress that in the event of a conflict between the Government of India and the Congress, the Company's co-operation and possible support of its resources would be withheld from the Government of India. (2) Under Clauses 2 and 3 of the Declaration form which laid down that 75 per cent of the share capital must be held by Indians and 66 per cent of the Directors of the Company must be Indians, the Company was required, in effect, to transfer the control of its business from its own hands into those of Indians who would have to be appointed specifically for the purpose.

Binny and Company, one of the largest business concerns in the Presidency, was on the boycott list. This company founded its business in Madras in 1790 and started its Mills in 1877. During the course of the 142 years since its foundation the Company had built up business expending considerable capital in the process. When it clashed with the Congress in 1931, the fully paid up share capital of all the various Indian companies including the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills and the Bangalore Woollen, Cotton and Silk Mills under its management, amounted to upwards of Rs. 1,88,00,000 involving interests in India upwards of 7 crores of rupees.<sup>23</sup>

The Company received innumerable complaints of picketing by Congress volunteers from their dealers all over the Presidency and also from Bombay, Benares, Lucknow, Cawnpur, Allahabad, Karachi, Delhi, Amritsar and other places. Acting on these, the Company made representation to the Congress Working Committee



to which the latter replied that the boycott of their mills would not be lifted; nor would the picketing of their dealers be stopped unless they satisfied the Congress on the principles laid down in the Agreement referred to already. In other words, subscription of the company to its declaration was the price that Congress demanded for the removal of its boycott. The Company argued that the provisions embodied in the settlement of 5 March 1931 were at variance with what the Congress claimed. Such "discrimination" meant forcible expropriation of British capital and interests in India. But it was officially recognised that the principles laid down in the Declaration were in accordance with the aforesaid Settlement.

The boycott list apart, the mills of Binny and Company were included also in the notification issued by the Joint Secretary of the Swadeshi Sub-Committee of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee and published in the *Bombay Chronicle* of 8 September 1931. The Company complained that its mills were deliberately "singled out for attack doubtless owing to the easy advertisement they provided of Congress potentiality". The British managers of the concern imagined that the premier stature it enjoyed made it a primary target of picketing by the Congress. Bringing the Binny and Company round to subscribe to the agreement, they thought, would be deemed a major breakthrough for the boycott movement. The concern also contended that the mills under its control were definitely Indian Companies registered with Rupee Capital with a mixed Board of European and Indian Directors and employing upwards of 15,000 Indian workers and engaged in producing Indian materials from Indian cotton by Indian labour for Indian consumption.<sup>24</sup>

By its refusal to subscribe to the Congress' Declaration regarding foreign textiles, the Binny and Company incurred a heavy loss. Agents and dealers of the Buckingham and Carnatic and Bangalore Mills were advised by the Congress not to take orders from these Mills in future. They were warned that in case of violation, the Congress would resort to peaceful picketing with a view to stopping the sale of these goods because the Mills of Binny and Company had been boycotted by the Indian National Congress. The Agents strictly obeyed the instructions of the great national body. They refused to take orders and requested the mills to settle it with the Congress and get the name of Binny removed from the boycott list. The boycott of the products of such a large group of industrial con-

cerns as was represented by the Buckingham and Carnatic and the Bangalore Mills with their widespread interests in the whole Presidency continued.

The Harvey or Madura Mills in Madura which suffered the worst set back during this Movement, had to give in ultimately. This firm was founded in 1863. During the civil disobedience in 1931, it had employed 20,000 workers and, under favourable conditions, could employ 10,000 more. It spun cotton yarn and had branches all over India. It sold yarn to dealers in many parts of India and to many Indians weaving at home. Harvey's firm initially refused to sign the pledge demanded of it for six months. However, when this resulted in a profit of 30 lakhs of rupees being turned into a loss of 17 lakhs, they finally budged. Harvey himself said that very few firms in India were able to refuse signature.<sup>25</sup>

Harvey maintained that there would be no civil disobedience or boycott of British goods if the Viceroy took stronger action. He dubbed Irwin as one of the weakest Viceroys in history under whose governance the British prestige had "drooped lower than ever before". Men of his ilk were very happy when Willingdon succeeded Irwin as they had known of the former's repressive acts as Governor of Madras during the days of the Non-co-operation Movement. Harvey said, "We have now got a man and a Ruler, one who has restored our prestige to the level necessary to maintain law and order without bloodshed and shame".<sup>26</sup>

It was in respect of boycott of British textiles that the Civil Disobedience Movement achieved the maximum. The Congress succeeded not only in greatly reducing British imports, but in actually dictating to British firms in India the terms on which they would be allowed to continue their trade. The British considered the terms "most humiliating". Was it not a fact that Britain's exports to India which totalled £ 70,273,000 (13.3 per cent of the total exports of British goods) in 1913 and was enhanced to £ 181,239,000 in 1920 dwindled to £ 32,288,000 (only 8.27 per cent of their exports to all countries) in 1931?<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile all India Politics was moving from crisis to crisis. Tension was for ever mounting. To make confusion worse confounded, the British Prime Minister made his most infamous "Communal Award" in August 1932. Since the Second Round Table Conference failed to reach a consensus, the Prime Minister took upon himself to make this announcement on a vital matter which, among other things, had provided for separate electorates



for the depressed classes. This provoked Gandhiji who was in Poona prison then, to launch his "fast unto death" as he was always opposed to a vivisection of the Hindu community. It was genuinely feared that MacDonald's Award would nullify the good that would result from allowing the Depressed Classes to vote in general electorates. If the intention of these proposals were to further drive them off the Hindu community, it would be, as Mahatma Gandhi pleaded before the Round Table Conference, "disastrous in their own interests".

Gandhiji began his fast on 20 September. Vigorous efforts were made to bring about a settlement between the caste Hindus and the Depressed Classes. Talks were held in Poona and among the prime movers in these negotiations were B.R. Ambedkar, leader of the Depressed Classes and Rajaji. Within four days, a settlement satisfactory to both Ambedkar and Gandhiji was reached, demonstrating the Indian ability to compose its domestic differences. The British Government accepted the Poona Pact on 26 September 1932. The same evening Gandhiji broke his fast, sipping a glass of sweet lime offered to him by Kamala Nehru, amidst the recital of verses from *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore. The most significant feature was the presence there of three untouchable fellow prisoners.<sup>28</sup> The Poona Pact was a substantial gain for Indian nationalism. Even Ambedkar who had often run down Gandhiji from various platforms and ridiculed his attempt at bringing about a social and moral revolution within Hinduism, was touched by Gandhiji's gesture.

In December 1932, the Government of India passed the Consolidated Ordinance Bill in the Indian Legislature. It was a highly repressive measure aimed at crushing the Congress and the patriotic fervour of the people. Under the auspices of the Madras Mahajana Sabha, a public meeting was held at the Gokhale Hall, Madras, on 3 December to protest against the Bill. The meeting expressed its opinion that the political situation in the country did not "warrant any repressive measure at all and in particular, such a highly repressive measure as is being rushed through the Legislature at present. . . . (it) cuts at the very root of the fundamental rights of citizenship, freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of the Press etc. . . . the Bill should be withdrawn from the Legislature at once". Supporting the resolution, Margaret Cousins who participated in the meeting made a speech which the Madras Government described as "highly objectionable and inflammatory".

Marking her protest against the powers of the Government to strangle the Congress, gag the Press, deny freedom of speech and free rights to assembly, exclude Congress representatives from all the conferences and discussions on the fate of India and deny the rights of picketing allowed in other countries, she concluded: "I for one, am ready to defy these Ordinances and prove that they have no power to suppress my right of free self-expression for the freedom of this old but newly-awakened great race with its holy leader and its gifts of a new technique for the world by which it can struggle and attain freedom without recourse to mutual murder which was the weapon and is still the weapon of the Western world". Following this, Margaret Cousins was arrested and sentenced to one year simple imprisonment.<sup>29</sup>

*Plea to end civil disobedience:*

The political situation throughout the country was baffling with thousands of civil resisters languishing in jails. The British Government continued to persist in its truculent attitude. The Viceroy turned down Gandhiji's request for an interview since the Congress had not withdrawn the Civil Disobedience Movement. The Secretary of State Samuel Hoare, sitting thousands of miles away from India exulted in making ridiculous statements that peace and security had been restored in India and that the Congress had been crushed. He refused to listen to better counsel that Gandhiji must be released forthwith as a prelude to a compromise with the Congress leaders.

Some among the Madras Congress were beginning to feel that civil disobedience had outlived its utility. It had been launched for three years then (1930–1933)—a most difficult period characterised by unprecedented conditions of economic depression. Thousands of the rank and file of the Congressmen had made phenomenal sacrifices. They had suffered incarceration, brutal lathi-charges and other cruelties at the hands of the Government; they had lost their life and property in the belief that the nation under Gandhiji's lead would achieve its goal as speedily as possible. It now looked as if all their sufferings had gone to waste. They felt that the wisest course in the circumstance would be to call off the Movement.

The nationalist organ, *The Hindu*, also appealed to the Mahatma to give up the agitation. The paper's plea for a re-orientation of the Congress policy invited wild protests from some Congressmen. A



joint statement issued by some of the prominent South Indian Congress leaders including K. Nageswara Rao, C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar and M. Bhaktavatsalam criticised *The Hindu's* appeal for the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement.<sup>30</sup> But *The Hindu* stuck to its guns. It must be clarified here that *The Hindu* was not satisfied with the White Paper either. It did not dispute the fact that the new constitutional set-up provided by the White Paper published on 18 March 1933 would by no means satisfy the national demand. The White Paper which was but a revised edition of the Round Table statements with "safeguards" further emphasised was not acceptable either to the Congress or to the Liberals. The document comprising 119 pages held out no prospect of conferring Dominion Status on India. All the same, *The Hindu* deemed that the changed circumstances were inopportune for continuing with the Civil Disobedience Movement. An answer to the national demand would have to be sought "along the lines which should obviate the necessity for a campaign directly aimed at putting pressure on the British Government or Parliament" the paper said.

Amidst this controversy, the news of Gandhiji's 21-day fast came like a bombshell. It was a "purificatory" fast which would commence on 8 May 1933.<sup>31</sup> In his telegram to the Government of India Gandhiji stated: "For reasons wholly unconnected with the Government and solely connected with the Harijan Movement and in obedience to the peremptory call from within, received about midnight, I have to take twenty one days' unconditional and irrevocable fast with water, soda and salt, beginning from noon on the 8 May ending at noon on 29 May. The fast might have commenced at once but for my being a prisoner and my anxiety to enable the local authorities to receive the necessary instructions for arrangements during the fast and to avoid all possible embarrassment to Government".<sup>32</sup>

Gandhiji was released on 9 May. He announced the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement for a month. He broke his fast on 28 May 1933. But it did not bring a change of heart in the rulers. His request for an interview having been mercilessly turned down by the Viceroy,<sup>33</sup> Gandhiji revived the Civil Disobedience Movement but said it would be confined to individual effort. This was strongly criticised by the *intelligentsia*, as satyagraha offered by individuals on their own responsibility, would not lead to a change in the status of the nation.

Sripad Shankar—ex Secretary of the Madras Congress Com-

mittee addressed two letters, one to Gandhiji and another to Aney, Acting President of the Congress, urging the immediate withdrawal of the Movement. He warned therein that any further offer to the Government either by Gandhiji or the Congress would be disowned by the entire younger elements in the Congress. For such an act would only be inviting insults and humiliations from the Government. Sripad Shankar was positive that a large majority of Congressmen in the Presidency stood for capturing the Councils under the new constitution though they had remained "scrupulously silent" over it till then.<sup>34</sup>

Satyamurti said that in seeking to justify the resumption of civil disobedience on the ground of the Viceroy's refusal to grant him an interview, Gandhiji was shifting the initiative from the Congress to the Government. He pointed out that the question of reviving the Civil Disobedience Movement must be decided on its own merit and not in relation to the attitude of the Government.<sup>35</sup> Signifying his contempt for Gandhiji's fast, Satyamurti expressed concern that the National Movement would very soon become a religious movement confined to the "Gandhian coterie". He urged the "realist politicians" who believed in the programme of C.R. Das to "rescue the National Movement from this miasma". About boycotting the next elections, he said that the Congress would be committing "political suicide" if it did so and confined itself to merely "what is euphemistically called the constructive programme of the Congress. I think we should put forward a militant political and economic programme before the electorate and contest the elections while making it clear that we cannot and will not accept any constitution short of *Purna Swaraj*".<sup>36</sup>

The general feeling among the Madras leaders was that the Poona Pact had not a bit improved the Congress position; the country had gone back to the position it held in January 1932; and the Government had stolen a "cheap victory" over the Congress by not releasing the political prisoners notwithstanding petitions and appeals from "respected and unexpected" quarters. The Harijan Movement of Gandhiji irked many. He was even charged with harming the power and prestige of the Congress, though unconsciously, by directing its activities towards the Harijan Movement. Since Gandhiji had not founded the Congress, some of his critics argued, he should not be allowed to lord over it.<sup>37</sup>

Towards the close of July 1933, Gandhiji disbanded his *ashram* and wired to the Bombay Government his proposal to lead a march



to Ras in Gujarat with his *ashram* companions. He stated that there would be no mass civil disobedience “but individuals will be invited to offer civil disobedience in terms of the Congress resolution”. On the basis of this telegram, Gandhiji, his wife and Secretary, along with 33 members of the Sabarmati *Ashram* at Ahmedabad, were arrested on 1 August under the Special Emergency Powers Act and lodged in Yerwada jail.<sup>38</sup> He was released soon and served with an order to stay in Poona which Gandhiji disobeyed. He was, therefore, again sentenced to one year imprisonment. Rajaji and 16 others who similarly defied prohibitory orders in Trichinopoly were sentenced to six months’ imprisonment. Since the Government had withdrawn from Gandhiji the privileges to carry on Harijan uplift work from the prison, he sent an ultimatum to the Government that if those facilities were not restored to him as before, he would go on a fast. The Government failing to respond properly, Gandhiji began his fast on 16 August. But he broke it on 23 August when the Government released him unconditionally.<sup>39</sup>

#### *The Mahatma in Madras:*

His tour of the Presidency at this juncture was undertaken mainly to disarm all suspicion in this part of the country. Gandhiji did succeed in dispelling to an appreciable extent the misgivings entertained by the Depressed Classes about his programme for their uplift. He arrived in Madras on 20 December 1933. Throughout his tour of almost all the districts of the Presidency lasting till the end of January 1934, he championed only the cause of the Harijans. Everywhere he appealed to the *Savarna* Hindus to fight the monster of untouchability. He pleaded with them to render the reparation that was long overdue to their less fortunate brothers. Addressing a public meeting at Calicut he said that Malabar was the blackest spot in India so far as untouchability was concerned and exhorted the audience to turn the blackness to good account.<sup>40</sup>

At Madras, he received a deputation of the executive of the Madras Depressed Classes Federation on 22 December 1933. The deputation consisted of R. Srinivasan, V. Dharmalingam Pillai, Swami Sahajananda, P.V. Rajagopala Pillai and Pushparaj. The others present were V. Bhashyam Iyengar, President of the Provincial Board of Servants of Untouchables Society, K. Nageswara Rao Pantulu, V. Venkata Subbiah, K. Bhashyam and R.V. Sastri, editor, *Harijan*. Gandhiji concurred with the deputationists that the Poona

Pact could become nugatory in view of the "tactics and unfair methods" of the *Savarna* Hindus, but assured them of the useful role of the Board of Servants of Untouchables' Society which was absolutely unaffected by politics. He also explained why he kept the Harijan Movement aloof and prevented the Harijans from joining the civil disobedience Movement. He did not want to take advantage of the Harijan Movement to further the aims of the civil disobedience Movement. If he did, it would not be civil but criminal. He never wanted to use their Movement for a political purpose. He referred to the plea made by many Harijans living with him in the *ashram* to allow them to join the Movement and his disapproval of it. Further, the Servants of the Untouchables' Society was under the control of men like A.V. Thakkar and G.D. Birla who could not afford to offer civil resistance. Again Congressmen who were civil resisters were prevented from taking office in the aforesaid Central and Provincial Boards or any of their branches.<sup>41</sup>

Gandhiji met deputations of untouchables in other districts also. The Harijans of the south were thankful to Gandhiji for starting an unprecedented movement in the cause of their community which had given "a great impetus to the caste Hindus to banish untouchability".<sup>42</sup>

Gandhiji's concentration on the Harijan issue at this moment irked many a Congress leader in the Presidency. They felt that it was a distraction which would interfere with the thrust of the Civil Disobedience Movement which had not been called off by the Congress. They felt that the attention of the Nationalists in the Presidency had been diverted and their energies siphoned into what they perceived to be a side issue on the social front. In the meantime, governmental repression against the civil disobedience had reached an all time high. The repression in turn provoked a spirit of "wrathful defiance" against the imperial authorities. The situation in the Presidency calmed down only after the Civil Disobedience Movement was called off finally by the AICC at Patna in May 1934 and the Unlawful Associations Ordinances cancelled by the Government.<sup>43</sup>

Convinced that the masses had not received the full message of Satyagraha on account of its "adulteration in the process of transmission" Gandhiji notified that he should himself "for the time being bear the responsibility of civil resistance if it is to succeed as a means of achieving *Purna Swaraj*".<sup>44</sup>

The Civil Disobedience Movement which began with the de-



fiance of the Salt Act in April 1930 in the Presidency, was never broken off in the Presidency until May 1934. Whereas it was suspended in the rest of India for a short duration following the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March 1931, in the Presidency of Madras, it had a continuous life though perhaps attenuated for a while. The official versions about the Presidency on this Movement constitute a travesty of truth. On the one hand, the bureaucrats denied there were any excesses in dealing with the Movement. On the other, they did resort to unprecedented use of force and justified the same as the necessary minimum inevitable in the given circumstance. May be some of the officials over reacted in panic. But then, they had to concede that the Movement had gathered momentum to the point of generating panic in the British bureaucrats who had presumed they were safely entrenched in power in the placid waters of the Madras Presidency. On the mercantile front, the intensity of picketing brought the foreign Mills in the Presidency on their knees and got them to subscribe to the conditions stipulated by the Congress Working Committee. In the light of these historical evidences, the official contention of the then bureaucrats and the verdict of some of the recent Cambridge historians that there was no Civil Disobedience worth the name in the Presidency does not hold water.

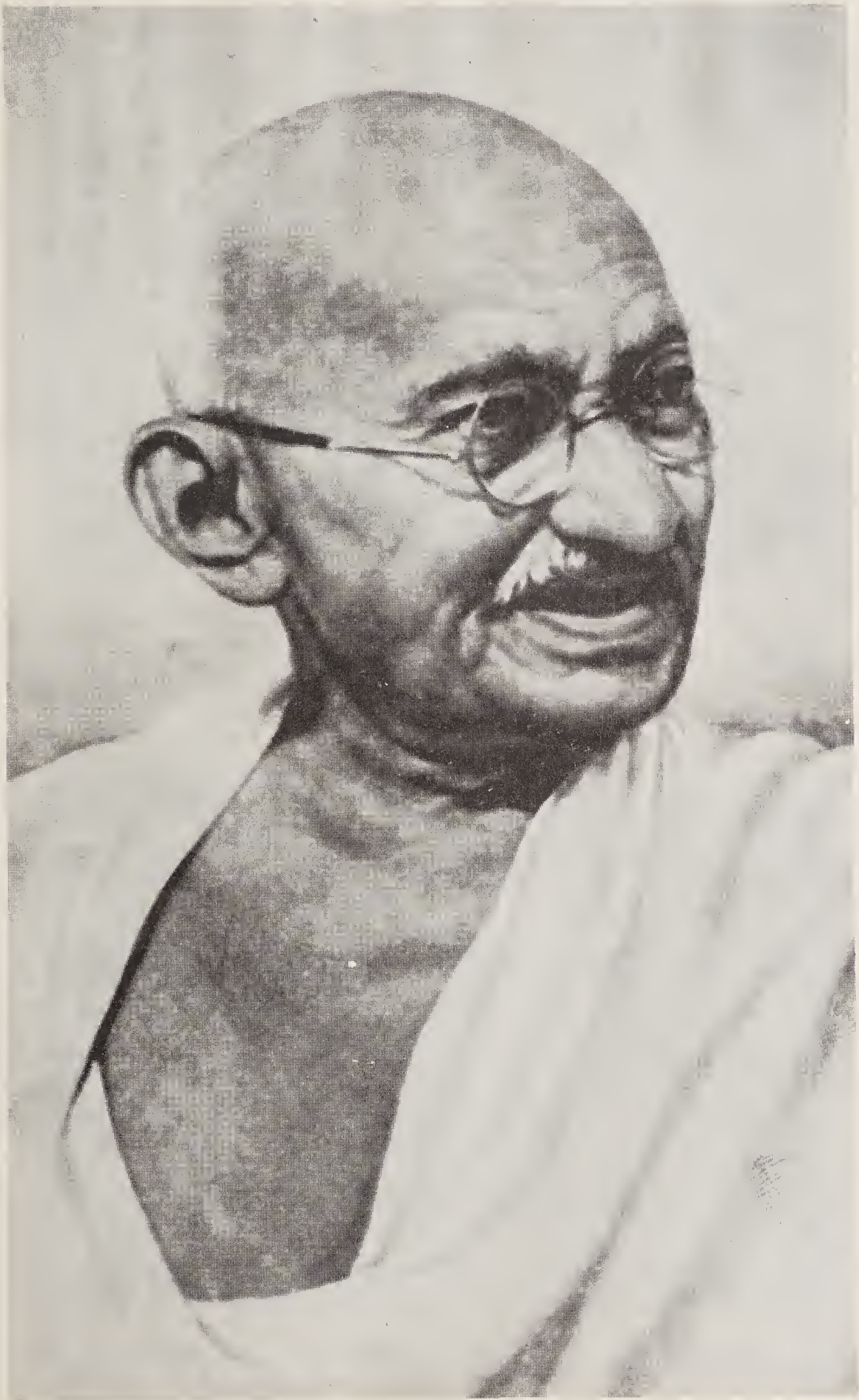
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Mahatma who led the March





## Pioneers of Non-Brahman Movement



Pitti Thegaraya Chetty



T. Madhavan Nair





Annie Besant

Prophetess of Indian Home Rule



V.S. Srinivasa Sastry

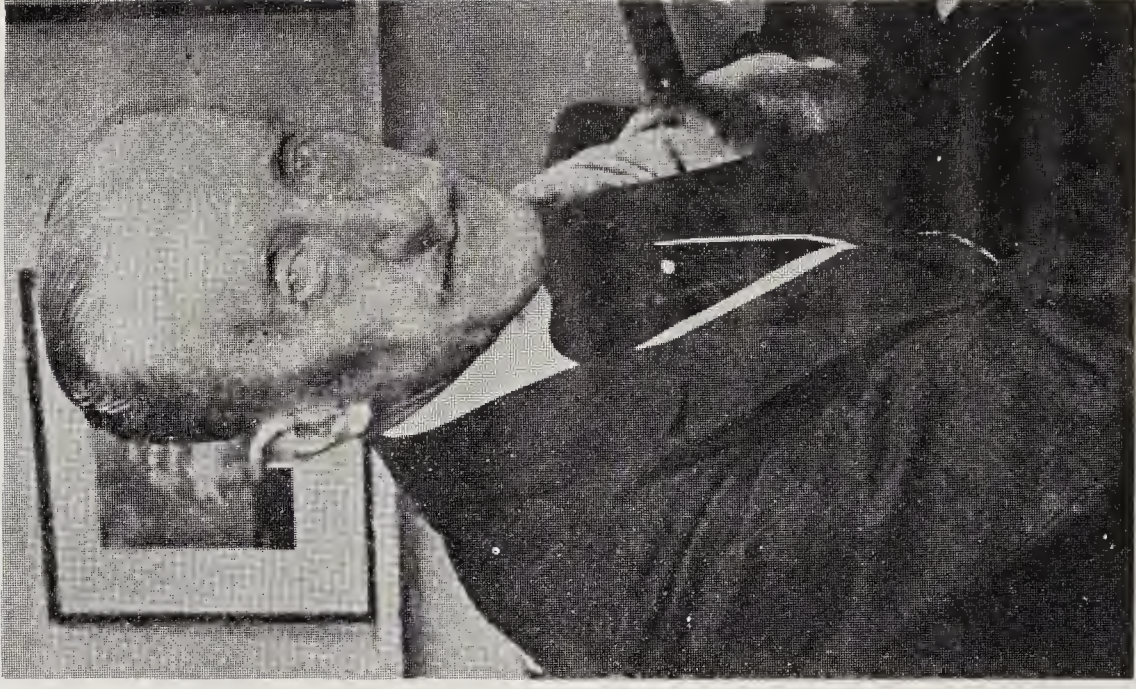
Silver-tongued orator of the British Empire





P. Kesava Pillai-

Founder of the Madras Presidency Association

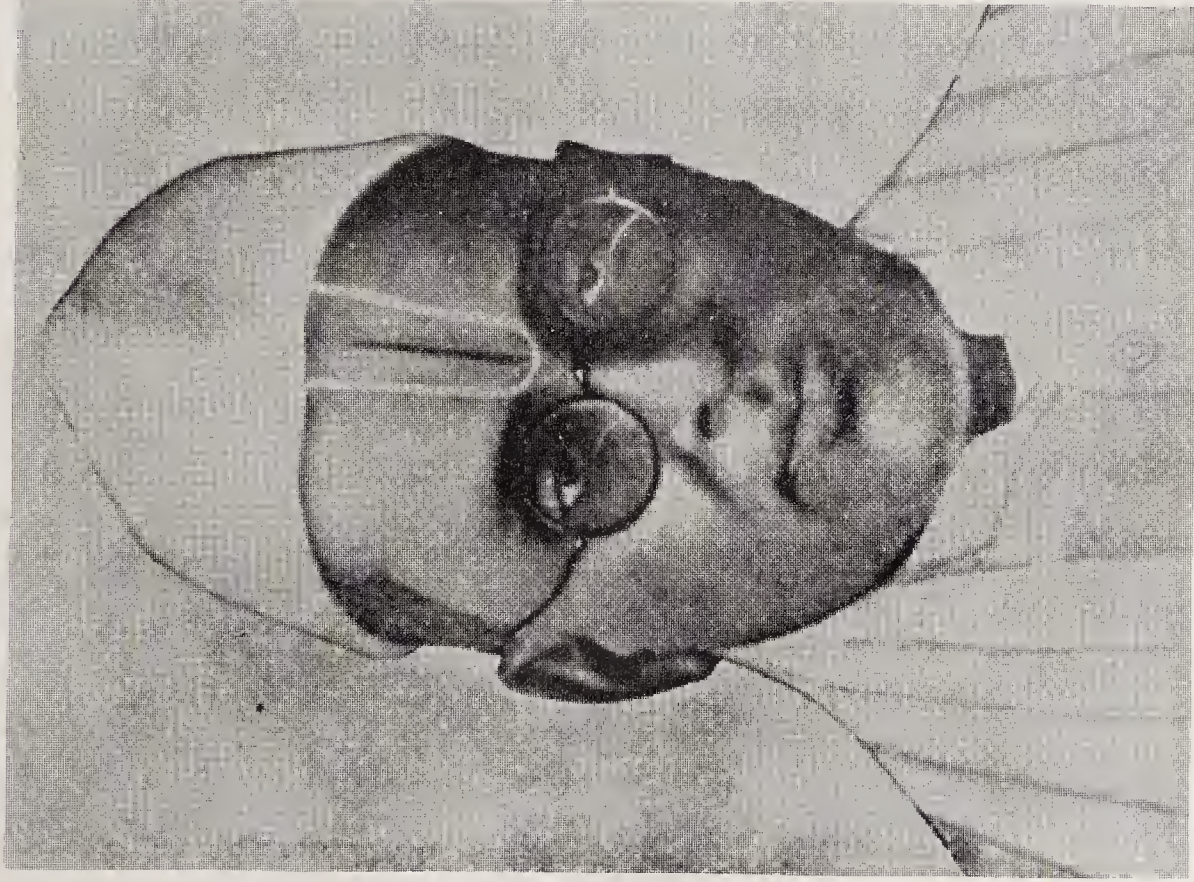


Willingdon

The Governor who "reigned" the Presidency



Stalwarts of struggle for freedom



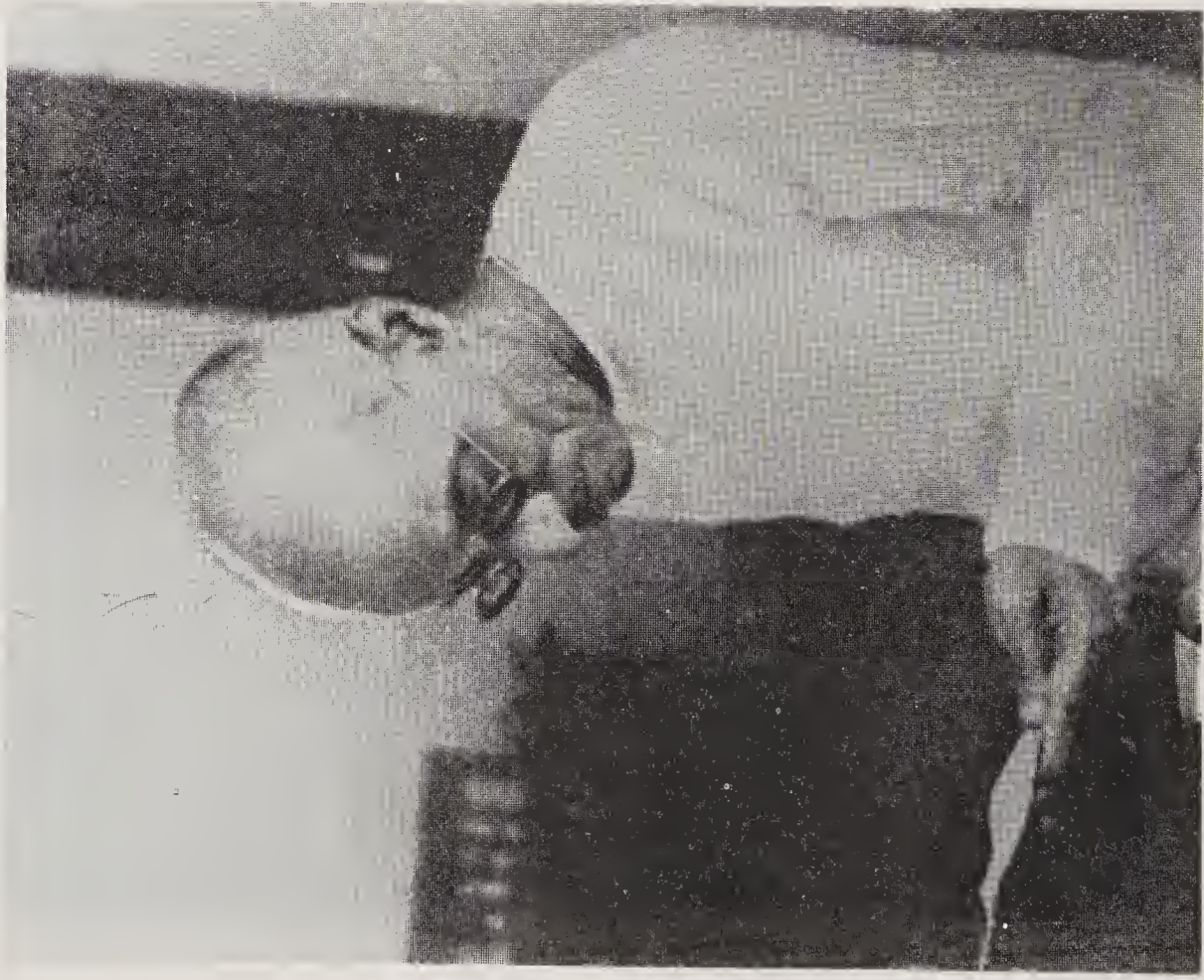
S. Srinivasa Iyengar



A. Rangaswamy Iyengar



Political Foes but personal friends



Rajaji



E.V. Ramaswami Naicker



Guru and Sishya



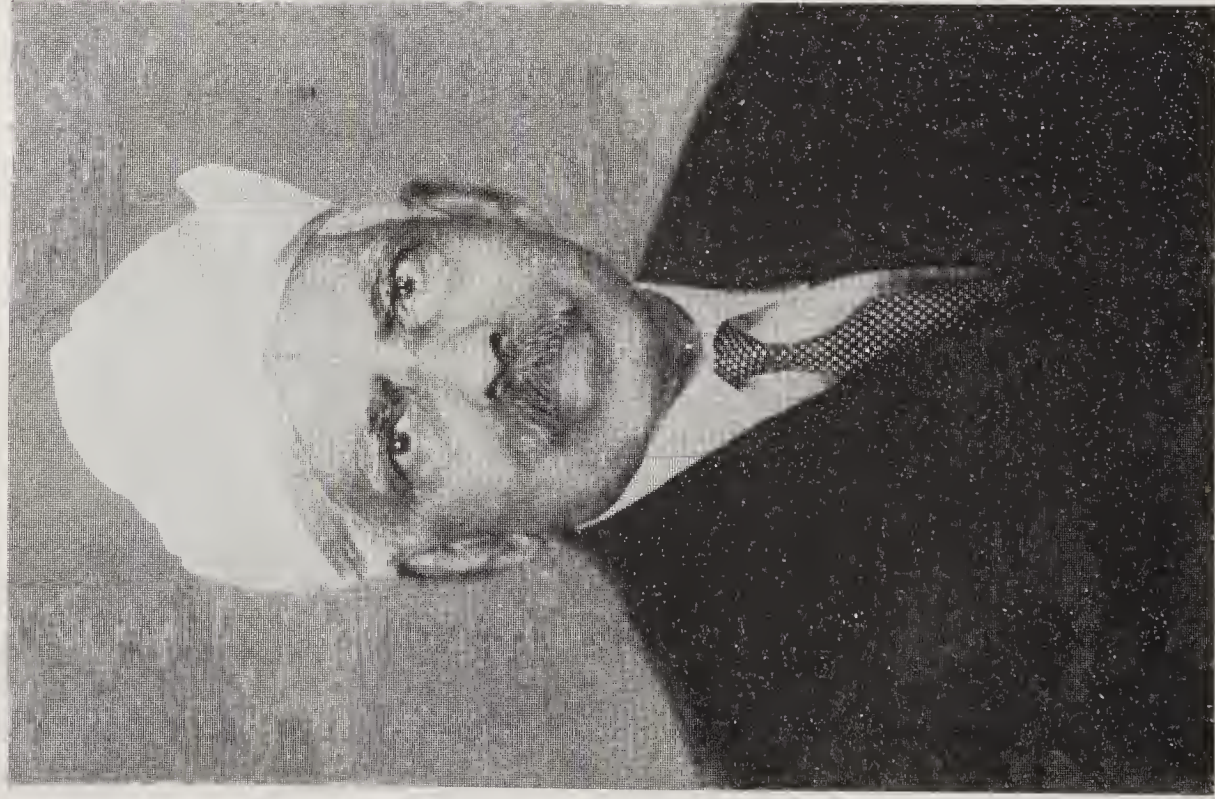
S. Satyamurti



K. Kamaraj Nadar



Radical and regal Ramaswamies



A. Ramaswami Mudaliar

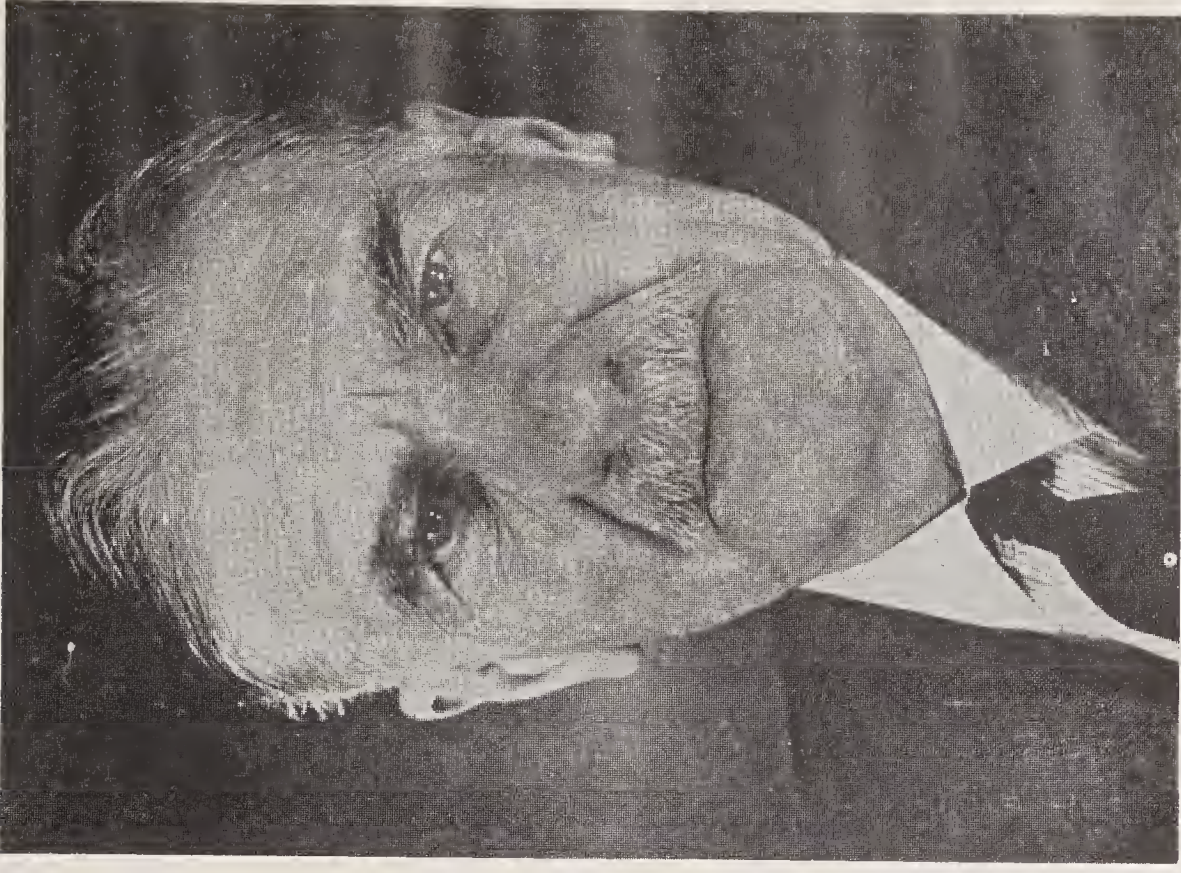


C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer





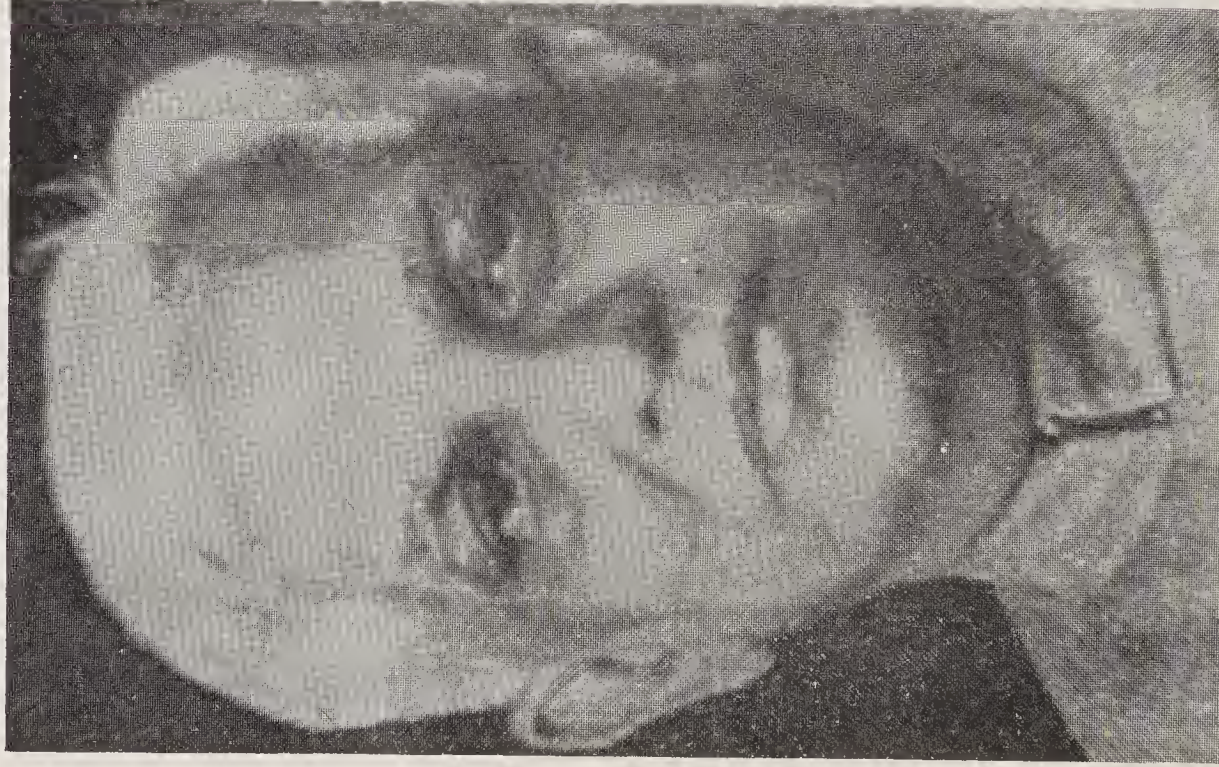
Erskine—He was Governor at a momentous point in the  
Presidency's history



Archibald Nye  
He saw the sun set over the British Empire



Silent mediators resolving deadlocks



Kasturi Srinivasan



B. Shiva Rao



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### The Act of 1935 and After

The White Paper (1933) to which reference has been made in previous Chapters provided for Provincial autonomy and the constitution of a Federation if a specified number of Princely States acceded. The authority of the Government of India remained unimpaired. There was a greater stress on “safeguards” which constituted an obstacle in the way to national freedom. In all crucial matters like defence, finance, commerce and industry no power had been transferred to the people of India. In the Provinces, the Governor would become a greater autocrat than he was under the Montford Constitution by which India was governed then.

The proposed constitution was far from being acceptable to any political party in India. But that hardly mattered to the British Government which proceeded with the document. Instead of asking the Parliament to approve the White Paper, the Government submitted it to a Joint Select Committee of Parliament for consideration in consultation with Indian representatives. M.C. Chagla\* correctly assessed the situation in the following words: “The whole procedure of the Joint Parliamentary Committee will be nothing else but fake. The country will be on its trial, charged with the heinous crime of having demanded freedom, the Joint Parliamentary Committee sitting as Judges, our eminent Indian friends as assessors, with no voice in the decisions and other less eminent Indians in the witness box to testify against their own country. . . . .”<sup>1</sup>

In 1934, the report of the Joint Select Committee was published. Every sentence of that reactionary report bore a testimony to the Committee’s blatant disregard of Indian opinion. Its conclusions made no pretensions to an agreement with Indian leaders.<sup>2</sup> The Congress Working Committee rejected the report at its meeting on 6 December 1934. The Indian Liberals also rejected it at their session in Poona. Srinivasa Sastri said “we may be chronic co-operators but

\*Eminent Lawyer; Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court (1947–58); Union Cabinet Minister (1963–68).

I do not think we shall go thus far”.<sup>3</sup> The newly elected Central Assembly declared the Scheme “bad and totally unacceptable”. But caring least for Indian public opinion, the House of Commons adopted the Indian Reforms Bill in June 1935. The last word on the document was pronounced when the Royal assent was given to the Bill on 2 August 1935 and it became law. It became known as the Government of India Act of 1935.

So far as the Madras Presidency was concerned, diarchy was abolished. There was provincial autonomy in that the Provincial Government was given exclusive authority over Provincial subjects and concurrent jurisdiction over certain other subjects. The Government of India was precluded from interfering in State administration save when the Governor General proclaimed an emergency or considered his intervention necessary to ensure peace and tranquility in the country. Like the Governor General, the Governor also enjoyed discretionary powers and special responsibilities which he could exercise without consulting his Ministers. Under these powers, he could nominate certain members to the Legislative Council; appoint and dismiss Ministers and members of the Public Service Commission; summon, prorogue or dissolve the legislature; stop the proceedings of a Bill which endangered peace and order; return a Bill to the Legislature for reconsideration with suggestions for amendment; veto a Bill or reserve it for the consideration of the Governor General; pass an Act or promulgate an Ordinance when immediate action was necessary or assume all the powers of the State Government and the Legislature in the event of a break-down of the constitution. Subject to these restrictions, the Ministers were invested with full powers over all subjects relating to Provincial administration. The Legislature was bi-cameral consisting of a Legislative Assembly (Lower House) and a Legislative Council (Upper House). The Council consisted of 45 members of whom some were elected and some nominated by the Governor. It was a permanent body, one-third of its members retiring every three years. The Assembly consisted of 215 members elected by voters arranged in separate electorates. Its tenure was five years. The Council had no power to vote on demands for grants or to sanction expenditure; it could only discuss the budget. These powers were exercised by the Assembly in which money Bills were first introduced. Whenever there was a difference of opinion between the two Houses, the Governor summoned a joint sitting to decide the disputed measure.



The Government of India Act of 1935 came into operation on 1 April 1937.

*Ban on Office-Acceptance:*

Prior to the elections of 1934, the Congress lifted the ban on council entry but not that on office-acceptance. The Congress which won every seat that it contested in the elections could not, therefore, accept office or form a Ministry. It is relevant to note here that the Provincial Congress won a stupendous victory in the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly also in 1934. All the seven candidates\* chosen for the seven Assembly seats won. The Congress captured 80 per cent of the poll. The notable defeats of the Justice party were those of A. Ramaswamy Mudaliar by Satyamurti and R.K. Shanmukham Chetty by Sami Venkatachalam Chetty.\*\*

The Congress ban on office-acceptance continued even after the passage of the Act of 1935. The actual position of the Congress was, while it decided to contest elections to the councils both under the existing and the new constitutions, the ban on office-acceptance was in force and would continue unless expressly lifted so as to work the new constitution. The Congress leaders of the Presidency were unhappy about this. Their hope of a positive decision emerging out of the meeting of the Working Committee at Wardha in July 1935 was also blasted. Owing to divergence of opinion on this vital issue, the Working Committee discreetly left the question open so that Congress opinion might have time to crystallise.<sup>4</sup>

This agonising uncertainty of the Congress programme at that crucial hour disillusioned all patriotic-minded people who were looking to that body as their only saviour. They were certainly not “panting to take office” as Governor Erskine misjudged their intention.<sup>5</sup> Since an “unsatisfactory constitution” provided by the new Act was definitely coming into force, there was every need for the Congress to accept office and work the new constitution. That would help the party considerably to implement its constructive programmes. Aside this, there was a strong feeling that if the Justice party were to be installed again in office, Madras would,

\*Satyamurti, Muthuranga Mudaliar, Sami Venkatachalam Chetty. T.S. Avinashilingam Chetty, T.S.S. Rajan, P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja and Syed Murtuza.

\*\* His participation in the Ottawa Conference as an Indian representative contributed largely to R.K.S. Chetty's downfall. There ensued an ugly controversy between him and the Nattukkottai Chetties over this defeat.

far from obtaining *Swaraj*, become the “Ulster” of India. Even Rajaji shared this view. Unfortunately, the Madras Session of the All India Congress Committee held in October 1935 also conveniently deferred its decision on office-acceptance. It was stated by the AICC that the Lucknow session of the Congress would consider the question *de novo*.<sup>6</sup> The Lucknow session under the Presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru referred it back to the AICC. The Congress was thus vacillating between acceptance and non-acceptance of office. Even in its election Manifesto issued in August 1936, the AICC had refrained from coming to a decision on office-acceptance by the Congress.<sup>7</sup> A favourable decision was not taken until the results of the provincial elections in 1936 were known.<sup>8</sup>

In 1936, the Congress party in the Presidency was busy preparing for the elections to be held in 1937 under the new Act of 1935. The Justice party which was ruling there had become unpopular mainly because it had held office for too long a period. Governor Erskine wished for a Congress majority in the elections as he felt that a Congress Government in the Presidency, if handled tactfully, would give “a fair administration” and “not give the Governor much trouble”.<sup>9</sup> He was no doubt perturbed over the socialist ideas spread by Jawaharlal Nehru who, in his Presidential address to the Congress in December 1936, said that socialism was the only remedy for India’s ills. But Erskine found consolation in the fact that it had very little following in the Presidency where a great bulk of the territory was being held under the *ryotwari* system which meant a multitude of small owners.<sup>10</sup>

As per the original plan, Satyamurti was to contest the elections from the Graduates’ constituency of the University. But, at the last moment he was compelled to step down in favour of Rajaji. The latter was manifesting increasing interest in the elections which culminated in his sudden decision to contest it himself from the University constituency. This event took place in the wake of Rajaji’s successful manoeuvre to oust Satyamurti from the Presidentship of the TNCC. Satyamurti was its President in 1935 and 1936. As President, he had organised the election campaigns with the active co-operation of his devoted disciple Kamaraj Nadar. A man who self-effaced himself for the nationalist cause was thus shabbily thrown off in December 1936 from the topmost position in the Provincial Congress just on the eve of the elections. But Satyamurti did not allow any of these incidents lessen the intensity of his electioneering for the success of the Congress.



When Gandhiji read the news of Rajaji's decision to contest the elections, he just laughed at it. "I was taken aback by the news about my consent. I am not ready to believe that his candidature is necessarily for the good. Since I have respect for his decisions, I do hope that this decision of his, will benefit the country. But my mind is not ready at present to go further than this".<sup>11</sup>

If this last minute dislodgement of Satyamurti had disheartened many, it had also delighted a few. Governor Erskine for one was much relieved of this change as he never took kindly to Satyamurti because of his "violent" speeches.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Satyamurti made substantial contribution towards the success of the Congress by his vigorous electioneering tours. In fact he even claimed that it was largely due to his own pleadings with him that Rajaji accepted to contest the elections.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout October and November 1936, the Congress leaders toured every part of the Presidency for electioneering. Veteran leaders like T. Prakasam and B. Sambamurti toured all the districts of the Andhra while the Tamil Nadu area was covered by Satyamurti, C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar, P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja, T.S. Avinashilingam Chetty and O.P. Ramaswamy Reddy. Jawaharlal Nehru's tour of the Presidency in October 1936 also strengthened not a little the electioneering campaign of the party. During his sojourn in Madras, Nehru stayed with Satyamurti as his guest in his small unpretentious street house in Triplicane. Kamaraj Nadar, who was then Secretary of the TNCC, was unsparing in his efforts to make Nehru's election tour a fruitful one.<sup>14</sup> The Congress had established committees in every village and town. Even in smaller hamlets they had agents and canvassers. P. Subbaroyan who was in the Congress party at this moment told the Governor that the majority of the Congress wanted to accept office and undo the anti-Brahman work of the Justice party.<sup>15</sup>

### *Election Eve:*

The dirty political game of floor crossing became most rampant on the eve of these elections. The original conditions laid down by the Congress for the selection of contestants included, among other things, the habitual wearing of *Khadar* and membership in the Congress for a prescribed period. But these were later diluted and the conditions reduced to the following three in the selection process: The candidates should have to: (1) sign the Congress pledge;

(2) mobilise their own finance; and (3) have a good chance of winning. When the propriety of such dilution was questioned, men like T. Prakasam argued that the future of the Congress being more important, it was wrong to go merely by a person's past sacrifices for the country! It was also said that non-Congressmen were no less patriotic than Congressmen! As a result, those who had never been in the Congress party as well as the renegades could easily slip into the Congress. Among the political turncoats who effortlessly walked back into the Congress now were P. Varadarajulu Naidu, T.A. Ramalingam Chetty, George Joseph, K. Sitarama Reddy, S. Ramanathan, V.I. Munuswami Pillai, Roche Victoria and P. Subbaroyan. P. Subbaroyan, who had been crossing the floor much too frequently as the exigency of the situation demanded, expectedly became a Congress candidate during this election. His action was strongly defended by no less a person than Rajaji. The latter announced in the public in July 1936 that Subbaroyan was "a very good Congressman", though he had deserted it only a short while ago and that he should not be accused of office-hunting.<sup>16</sup>

The Justice party was badly divided before the elections. There were very few dedicated workers in the party, most of them being self-seekers with no real interest in the growth of the party. Raja Annamalai Chetty and his son were nowhere in the scene when the election campaign was in full swing. They made no financial contribution either towards the Justice party's election fund.<sup>17</sup> Senior leaders of the party like K.V. Reddy Naidu who had personal grouse against the Raja of Bobbili poisoned the mind of Governor Erskine against him.\* This perhaps accounted for the Governor's inclination to support the Congress if they returned largely in the elections. Even the British members of the ICS appeared to have worked stealthily against the Raja of Bobbili, offended as they were by his moves on Indianisation of services. G.T. Boag proclaimed publicly: "Congress will be the future Government" while C.F. Brackenbury said loudly that he would prefer Rajaji to the Raja of Bobbili to serve under. Erskine's Government allowed its pensioners to join the Congress if they wanted.<sup>18</sup>

\* The Raja of Bobbili refused to nominate the widowed sister of K.V. Reddy Naidu to a membership of the East Godavari District Board. Bobbili was also against Naidu becoming the Law Member since he wanted to back up a more deserving man in A. Ramaswami Mudaliar. (Nilkan Perumal, *Bobbili — A Biography*, p. 117).



The *Justice* also had, by this time, become an ineffective organ. It was incurring a loss of Rs. 3,000 a month. However, the Raja of Bobbili who was co-opted on the Board of Directors of the paper was helping it very liberally: he passed on his pay cheque of over Rs. 5,000 straightaway to the *Justice* management. In January 1933, the name of the paper was changed from *Justice* to *New Times*. Ramaswami Mudaliar continued to edit it. After ten months, the paper resumed its original name and continued its publication. But its evil days started even before the elections when Ramaswami Mudaliar left for England in 1936 to take up his new assignment as Member of the India Council in London.\*<sup>19</sup> After the elections, the financial position of the *Justice* further deteriorated. Some leaders themselves bluntly refused to help it as the tone of the paper was no longer vehement and anti-Brahman. In his reply to the Editor's request for a donation of a hundred rupees, R.K. Shanmukham Chetty stated that the paper had failed to revive the spirit of the Non-Brahman Movement. "I was surprised to see the tone of dignified impartiality worthy of the *London Times* or *The Hindu*. Surely a paper intended to buck an opposition party which has been demoralised can afford to be a little more strong and little less sober", he wrote.<sup>20</sup>

On the eve of the elections, the Presidency witnessed the birth of two new parties—the People's party and the Madras Provincial Scheduled Castes party as well as the revival of the Madras Provincial branch of the Muslim League. The People's party was a splinter group of the Justice party formed by the Maharaja of Pithapuram (Andhra) mainly to dish Bobbili. According to the Biographer of the Raja of Bobbili, the Maharaja of Pithapuram had the blessings of men of the calibre of P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer and T.R. Venkatarama Sastri "who were pro-Congress at heart". During his election campaign for which he spent Rs. 20,00,000, the Raja of Pithapuram told the people that if they did not want to vote for him, they should, in the alternative, vote for the Congress.<sup>21</sup> Erskine forecast that even before the elections, the People's Party would be forced to "merge in or coalesce with" the Justice Party. The merger did not come about.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the emergence of these parties, the elections gave a

\* He was the third South Indian to hold this position, the first two being C. Sankaran Nair and P. Rajagopala Achariar.

stupendous victory to the Provincial Congress.\* Out of the 4 million voters in the Madras Presidency, two-thirds had voted for the Congress. In the Tamil region all but the constituency of Ranipet (North Arcot District) returned Congressmen.<sup>23</sup> The notable Congress victories were those of Rajaji from the Graduates' Constituency; Kamaraj Nadar from Virudunagar, who was returned unopposed; Muthuramalinga Tevar who defeated the Raja of Ramnad; V.V. Giri who defeated the Raja of Bobbili; and Sakti Vadivelu Gounder who defeated P.T. Rajan. The Justice Party was rooted out. All its stalwarts as also a good many of other contestants forfeited their deposits.<sup>24</sup> The Raja of Pithapuram, founder of the People's Party, was also defeated. Even among the candidates of the Depressed classes, no one was victorious. M.C. Rajah who won, stood as an Independent.

The number of seats gained by the Congress was much more than its own expectation. Whereas the party was hopeful of 115 seats in the Lower House (Legislative Assembly) and 17 in the Upper House (Legislative Council), it obtained 159 and 27 seats respectively in both Houses.<sup>25</sup>

Party	Legislative Assembly	Party	Legislative Council
Congress	159	Congress	27
Justice	21	Independent	11
Independent	15	Justice	4
Muslim League	9	Muslim League	3
Europeans	7	Europeans	1
Anglo-Indians	2		
Progressive Muslims	1		
People's Party	1		
Total	215		46

\* Congress Ministries were formed in seven Provinces—Bombay, Madras, United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces, Orissa and N.W.F.P. All but the last were Hindu majority Provinces. In the Muslim majority Provinces of Bengal, Punjab and Sind, the Congress fared badly.



*Rajaji-Erskine Parleys:*

The Congress, however, would not accept office unless certain conditions were fulfilled according to the AICC resolution drafted after the elections. Congress Ministries might be formed provided they obtained assurances that the Governors would not use their special powers to override their Ministers “in regard to their constitutional activities”. It has to be mentioned here that as early as 1 December 1936—which was St. Andrews Day—Erskine declared that it would be “wrong to say that under the new Constitution the reserve powers of the Governor may make the efforts of the Ministers nugatory.”\*<sup>26</sup>

At his very first interview with Governor Erskine, Rajaji wanted a written assurance that the latter would behave constitutionally and abstain from using the safeguards in the ordinary course of Government business unless orders to do so came from the Viceroy or the Secretary of State for India. The Governor underscored the constitutional impropriety of giving any such assurance regarding the powers vested in him under the Act. Thereupon Rajaji suggested that it would ease the situation if the Viceroy met Gandhiji and agreed with him on a formula regarding the safeguards to be used. Evidently Rajaji wanted this to be conveyed to the Viceroy. Though Erskine expressed his unwillingness to Rajaji to act as intermediary in this negotiation, he did inform the Viceroy of Rajaji’s suggestion. He wrote that since Rajaji was “one of Gandhi’s real intimates, it may well be that Gandhi himself put him up to tell me in order that I should pass it on to you . . . . .”<sup>27</sup> The Viceroy also informed all provincial Governors secretly about the substance of Erskine’s talk with Rajaji “in view of its importance”.<sup>28</sup> The viceroy also expressed his anxiety to dispel any apprehensions on the part of the Congress that they would not get a fair deal from the British if they took office. “I would myself be disposed to err on the side of generosity rather than otherwise where there was any question of doubt” he wrote.<sup>29</sup> He said that it had already been made abundantly clear in Parliament and through other utterances that any Ministry

\* In British India, important political announcements would be made by Governors on Saint Andrews Day. Lord Erskine had been scrupulously adhering to this tradition. His speeches on these days were generally appreciated. There were occasions when *The Hindu* had paid very warm tributes to him editorially on the following day (Nilkan Perumal, *Two Important Men*, p. 9).

in office could look for the utmost help, sympathy and support from Governors, within the framework of the Act. He wanted Erskine to reaffirm readily those assurances so far as Madras was concerned. However, having regard to the terms of the Act, it would be impossible to give any oral or written assurance as suggested by Rajaji.<sup>30</sup> Besides, when the Governors had not given any assurance to non-Congress Ministries already formed in some of the Provinces, how could they guarantee it in some and not in others?

It was evident from this correspondence that the Governor and the Viceroy were doing their best to persuade the Congress to take over, notwithstanding the latter's declared antagonism to the Constitution. The Viceroy's words were conveyed to Rajaji when he met the Governor on 9 March. Rajaji was much disappointed as mere words would not satisfy the Congress. Erskine felt that it was Gandhiji's "trick" to come out with an impossible condition at the last moment. It was also the view taken in Delhi that "Gandhiji put forward such a proposal with the full knowledge that it could not be accepted and that his aim was to put the Government in the wrong".<sup>31</sup>

On 25 March when Rajaji met Erskine for the third time, he submitted to the Governor a formula. After setting forth briefly what transpired between him and the Governor during the previous interviews, the formula stated: "as a result of these conversations, I have understood from H.E. that it is not possible for him legally to give any pledge which would divest him of his responsibilities under the statute, but I am assured that if we take office, H.E. will not use his special powers of interference or set aside the advice of the Cabinet in matters pertaining to and within the legitimate scope of the Provincial Ministry". Rajaji proposed to discuss his formula with Gandhiji the following day when the latter was expected to arrive in Madras.

The Madras negotiations of these days assumed all-India importance. In the first place, it was significant that Gandhiji was in Madras during this crucial hour. Secondly, Rajaji was indisputably the outstanding political figure next to Gandhiji. His refusal to form the Ministry and his subsequent confidential confabulations with Erskine became the most momentous event throughout India. *Madras was thus in the limelight in demanding constitutional freedom in letter and spirit.* This made Erskine overcautious in making statements. As he himself said, he felt the need to be "exceedingly careful in anything I say".<sup>32</sup>



Erskine wired Rajaji's formula to the Viceroy seeking his advice. But the latter could not accept it.<sup>33</sup> On the evening of 26 March Rajaji met the Governor to say that Gandhiji did not agree to his formula.<sup>34</sup> About a fortnight after this, on 8 April, Zetland, the Secretary of State, made a statement that it would not be possible for the Governors to give the assurance asked for without amending the Constitution. The statement also indicated that no purpose would be served by the Viceroy meeting Gandhiji. This statement was made after consultations with the officers of the Crown in England.<sup>35</sup>

### *Interim Ministry:*

The Governor who was bent upon forming the Ministry by 1 April 1937 at the latest, had to break with Rajaji who was not prepared to assume office unconditionally. He gave the Congress leaders a grace period of three months to reconsider their attitude. If they did not arrive at any decision until then, he would be left with no other alternative but to dissolve the Assembly. The Governor also issued a *Press Communique* on 27 March 1937 setting forth the various meetings he had had with Rajaji and the latter's refusal to form a Ministry unconditionally.<sup>36</sup>

The Governor first sent for V.S. Srinivasa Sastri to form a Ministry. He did so because the Justice party had fared badly at the hands of the electorate. The party which had almost an unbroken control of the Legislature since 1920, obtained only 21 seats in the Lower House as against the Congress' 159. "One of our real troubles in the South for the last ten years has been the hostility of the Brahmans and the fact that no Brahman with any self-respect would support a Justice candidate was one of the causes of their (Justicites) defeat" wrote Erskine.<sup>37</sup> He was also prompted by the desire to give the Brahman Liberals a chance. After taking twenty four hours to think about it, Sastri declined the offer. He did so ostensibly on grounds of age and health but in reality owing to the fear of possible reaction from the Congress to his acceptance of office. He said his liberal friends too would not agree to take office. The disgusted Governor wrote that the Indian Liberals had no guts and were afraid of the Congress.<sup>38</sup> He also said he was not surprised at the attitude of the Liberals as "a more pussilanimous collection of politicians than these Liberals would be difficult to find in any quarter of the globe".<sup>39</sup>

Having failed with the Liberals, there remained only the Justice party and the Independents for the Governor to turn to. After much deliberation, Erskine finally sent for K.V. Reddy Naidu of the Justice party who readily accepted the invitation to form a Ministry. The Ministry consisted of six members in all — K.V. Reddy Naidu, Pannirselvam (Indian Christian and Executive Councillor), Kumararaja of Chettinad (Minister of Education in the previous Justice Ministry), Palat (an Independent from Malabar), M.C. Rajah (leader, All India Depressed Classes) who owed allegiance to no party and Khalifulla (member, Muslim League of Trichinopoly).<sup>40</sup> The Governor felt gratified at the response of the non-Brahman leaders who did not lack “guts” to agree to shoulder responsibility at a most difficult time. It was agreed that the Ministry would meet the Assembly only in July. If it was defeated on a vote of no-confidence, then the Assembly would be dissolved and fresh elections held. If the Congress won and again refused to form the Ministry, then under Section 93 of the Government of India Act, the Governor would take over the administration of the Presidency.<sup>41</sup> The Congress press which had unanimously supported the Congress position criticised the formation of the Ministry under Reddy Naidu. *The Hindu* which felt that the assurance demanded by the Congress was a mild promise which in no way was incompatible with the provisions of the Act, attacked the formation of an Interim Ministry. It was characterised as highly unconstitutional.<sup>42</sup>

Whatever the merits of the case of the Congress *versus* Governors on the issue of assurances, few had a good word for the new Ministry of Reddy Naidu. The Congress was naturally hostile to it. The Justice leaders who were not included in it disliked it on account of personal jealousies. Reddy Naidu committed a grave blunder when he flouted Bobbili by failing to consult him before accepting the offer of the Governor. He and his colleagues had also ignored the party decision. For, it was only on 26 March 1937 that the Justice party had taken a decision that no party man should have anything to do with an Interim Ministry then contemplated by the Governor. Naidu who formed the Ministry made it known that he no longer belonged to the Justice party! This declaration naturally shocked Bobbili. A.T. Pannirselvam and Muthiah Chetty informed the Governor that they would accept a place in the Interim Ministry as Independents!<sup>43</sup> The Governor was also to blame to some extent. After exhausting all other sources when he fell back on the Justice party, Erskine should have summoned its leader and taken him



into his confidence. But in the "hurry and worry" of the moment, the right procedure was not adopted. In accepting the offer in haste, Reddy Naidu had shown that he had "more appetite than taste and alienated the only body that could have given him the substance or the shadow of organised support".<sup>44</sup>

The Ministry began well by putting out a programme the main features of which were: specific reduction of land revenue; appointment of a strong Committee under Marjoribanks to go into the whole question of the reform of the land revenue system and to report to the Government; and the raising of a loan for the purpose of relieving agricultural indebtedness. The Tanjore District *Delta Mirasdars'* and Land owners' Association, Mayavaram offered their grateful thanks for the reduction in land revenue.<sup>45</sup> However, the Ministry's charge that the Congress had betrayed the electorate by not accepting office was baseless. For the *hartal* observed in Madras on 1 April 1937 to mark the "Anti-Constitution Day", demonstrated the "unique hold the Congress has on all sections of the community and the resentment with which the imposed constitution is regarded in India."<sup>46</sup>

Even with his very friendly Ministry the Governor had to use his special powers under the Act on two occasions. When there were troubles over the postings of Civil Servants, he had to intervene. Again when the Ministers wanted to remove from office the Advocate General simply because he was a Brahman and install a non-Brahman, the Governor insisted on the continuance of Alladi Krishnaswamy Iyer.<sup>47</sup>

In the meantime, there were two rumours set afloat in the Presidency. One was that Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru were determined not to allow the Congress to take office. The higher officials in the capital were to some extent responsible for this. They even averred that if Gandhiji had not gone to Madras in March, Rajaji and Erskine would have come to an amicable settlement. This was responsible for the prevalent view that Rajaji was anxious to form a Ministry. The second rumour which spread particularly in Government quarters was that another Civil Disobedience Movement was in the offing and that they must get ready to quell it. It was stated that repression would be "very effective this time and the movement would be squashed within a few months".<sup>48</sup>

On 6 May 1937, Zetland, Secretary of State made another statement in the House of Lords wherein he admitted clearly and definitely that "the initiative and responsibility for the whole Govern-

ment of the Province though in form vesting in the Governor passes to the Ministry as soon as it takes office". He also said that even if the Governor considered such a situation had arisen for his exercising his reserve power, he would not "immediately set himself in open opposition to the Ministry" but would present his own difficulties before the Ministers, "the moment he sees a risk that he and they may not see eye to eye in the matter".<sup>49</sup>

*The Hindu* welcomed Zetland's statement as a more earnest attempt to understand the Congress viewpoint than was the case in his earlier statement of 8 April. Anxious to end the *impasse*, *The Hindu* broadly hinted that if the Governor should call upon Rajaji to form a Congress Ministry, there would be no difficulty about the Congress accepting office.<sup>50</sup> The *Madras Mail* also commented favourably on this suggestion. Even old Liberals like P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer and Venkatarama Sastri welcomed it and criticised the official Congress attitude.<sup>51</sup>

According to Gandhiji though Zetland's statement was agreeably worded it gave no specific answer to the specific Congress demand. The Congress now made it known that it would be well if the Governor gave an assurance that when differences arose between his Ministry and himself, he would dismiss the Ministers and not wait for the Ministers to resign.<sup>52</sup> Dismissal of the Ministry was no easy task as such an act on the part of the Governor would give the Ministers the legitimate safeguard. Before taking such a step he would naturally have to consult the highest authority—the Secretary of State, who would have to give fullest weight to the merits of the case. And both the Indian and the British public would have to be satisfied as to the serious nature of the step. The Government felt that having abandoned the demand for assurance, the Congress was now concentrating on "dismissal *versus* resignation." Compromise did not appear to be within reach.\*

Two days prior to Zetland's statement, i.e., on 4 May, a communication signed by 167 members of the Madras Legislative Assembly and 30 of the Madras Legislative Council expressing no confidence in the Interim Ministry was forwarded by Rajaji to the

\* When there was no change in the situation with the Congress declining to accept office except on conditions which the British could not grant, the British Broadcasting Corporation announced that office was offered to Rajaji but he refused it. This was followed by a dementi issued by the Viceroy in the *Reuter*. Later, the B.B.C. itself broadcast a correction. (Viceroy's telegram, 2 July 1937, *Erskine Papers*).



Governor. Rajaji stated therein that the signatories were forced to take that step as a meeting of the Legislature had not been summoned by the Governor. A very large majority in both Houses had thus denounced and repudiated the Council of Ministers constituted by the Governor. The communication also stated that the Ministers "have no claim, confidence or qualification entitling them to speak, act or advise in any matter in our name or on behalf or in the name of the people of the Province".<sup>53</sup> On 9 May, a meeting of 131 Congress legislators endorsed this action of their leader. They also passed a resolution declaring Zetland's statement of 6 May as unsatisfactory and expressing want of confidence in the new Ministry.<sup>54</sup> On 27 May through the intervention of Mirza Ismail and others, Rajaji had another meeting with the Governor. Rajaji said that he would be satisfied if, instead of a demand for dismissal in the event of differences of opinion between the Governor and the Ministers, the Governor would demand the resignation of his Ministers. The Government felt that this also implied a hostile relationship between the Governor and the Ministers which would not promote "an harmonious and fruitful collaboration" between them.<sup>55</sup>

In the meantime, in June 1937 Stanley the former Governor of Madras, made some statements in London which caused considerable embarrassment to the British authorities. He suggested a postponement of the meeting of the Legislatures so as to enable the Governors to come to agreements with their Congress leaders before the sessions were called. This amounted to asking the Governors to intrigue against existing Ministries. Stanley also stated that the Governors were more than ready to meet the Congress half way.<sup>56</sup> This created an impression among the Europeans that there was a distinct climb down on the part of the Government. It also encouraged the Congress to entertain the hope that assurances in some form would be given. But the Secretary of State telegraphically stated that Stanley's pronouncement about the Government meeting the Congress half way was unauthorised.<sup>57</sup>

### *Congress accepts Office:*

On the night of 21 June, the Viceroy broadcast a short message from Simla. It was a policy statement defining the scope of the Governor's powers. The Viceroy expressed his conviction in these words: "... the shortest road to that fuller political life which many of us so greatly desire is to accept this constitution and to work

it for all it is worth and that in the full working and developing this constitution lies the best hope for the general and lasting amelioration in the conditions of the rural population and of the humbler sections of society—which all of us so ardently desire”.<sup>58</sup> The message was generally well-received in the Presidency. Even in the Congress hierarchy it was reported to have found favour with all but Jawaharlal Nehru who described the 1935 Act as “a new Charter of Slavery”. He had always maintained that acceptance of office would inevitably mean a kind of “partnership with British Imperialism in the exploitation of the Indian people”. But on this point Nehru did not carry all his colleagues with him.<sup>59</sup> *The Hindu* rejected his plea outright.<sup>60</sup>

All but Jawaharlal Nehru were eager that the Congress should assume office in the Provinces. The air was thick with the rumour that Gandhiji was likely to throw his weight in favour of Rajaji, Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel all of whom stood for office acceptance.<sup>61</sup>

On 8 July the Congress Working Committee sprang a surprise on all by its decision to permit Congressmen to accept office following the declarations made by the Secretary of State and the Viceroy. The declarations were regarded as making an approach to the Congress demand although falling short of the assurances demanded by it.<sup>62</sup>

There was a general recognition that *The Hindu* played a crucial role in successfully handling such a sensitive matter through all the stages for three months. Even the Viceroy appreciated its leading articles on the crisis of non-acceptance of office. The paper's representative at the capital B. Shiva Rao had many interviews with both Gandhiji and the Viceroy. When Viceroy Linlithgow complained that Gandhiji was deliberately putting forward one proposal after another merely to put the Government in the wrong and that he had no intention of allowing the Congress to take office, Shiva Rao hastened to assure him of Gandhiji's real objective: it was to see a “big constructive movement grow in India.”<sup>63</sup>

Erskine was astonished at the turn of events. He cried in jubilation: “My Ministers are going to resign on 14 July and I hope to have the Congress Ministry formed on 15 July . . . . .”<sup>64</sup> The Viceroy was no less happy about the decision of the Congress to assume office. Nor did the Secretary of State lag behind in rejoicing in the event. He sent a telegraphic message to the Viceroy: “The Cabinet at a meeting this morning desired me to convey to you and



through you to Governors, their congrats on the decision of the Congress to accept office, and to express their appreciation on the manner in which a matter of great delicacy had been handled. I associate myself with their warm congrats".<sup>65</sup>

The much awaited Congress Ministry was formed in July 1937 under the Premiership of Rajaji, "a true blue patriot"<sup>66</sup> and an astute politician. The contribution of his Ministry during the short tenure of 27 months to the all-round betterment of the people gave the lie to the rash statement of the British bureaucracy that India had no competent Indian to run the administration.

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

# Rajaji at the Helm—1937-39

In the Madras Presidency, a ten member Congress Ministry headed by Rajaji was installed on 14 July 1937. Rajaji, the first Minister, was designated as Prime Minister. This was a graceful concession shown by the British authorities in India in response to the request of the first Ministers of some provinces including Madras to be so styled. They cited the Canadian example where the Chief Ministers styled themselves Prime Ministers. The other Ministers were: T. Prakasam (Minister for Revenue), V.V. Giri (Minister for Labour and Industries) and B. Gopala Reddi (Minister for Local Administration), representing the Telugu districts; P. Subbaroyan (Minister for Education), T.S.S. Rajan (Minister for Public Health), S. Ramathan (Minister for Public Information), V.I. Muniswami Pillai (Minister for Agriculture and Rural Uplift) and Rajaji (Prime Minister) representing the Tamil areas; K. Raman Menon\* (Minister for Courts and Prison) representing the Malabar region; and Yakub Hasan (Minister for Public Works) representing the Muslims. V.I. Muniswami Pillai was a Harijan. For the first time in the history of the Presidency, a Harijan was inducted into the Ministry.\*\* He was a “Harmless non-entity”. And Yakub Hasan was the first Muslim Minister.\*\*\* He was elderly and did not appear to have shown “much sign of any individuality of his own in his department”.<sup>1</sup>

Bulusu Sambamurti was the Speaker of the House. The leader of the Opposition was Kumararaja Muthiah Chetty of the Justice party who was ably assisted by A.T. Pannirselvam, also a Justicite

\*After his demise in February 1939, C.J. Varkey was made Minister for Courts and Prison.

\*\*M.C. Rajah of the Depressed Classes was made a Minister of the Interim Government which ruled for three months and a half (April-July 1937). But he owed his appointment to the British Governor, not to the Justice Party.

\*\*\*During the Justice Ministry Mohammad Usman was appointed a Member of the Governor's Executive Council. He also owed his appointment to the generosity of the British Governor.

and a member of the Interim Ministry. Among other effective members of the Opposition may be mentioned T.T. Krishnamachari, Independent, representing the Chamber of Commerce; Langley and Abdul Hamid Khan representing respectively, the Europeans and the Muslims. The Opposition in the Legislative Council included K.V. Reddy Naidu and V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, then Privy Councillor and President of the Servants' of India Society.

The new Legislature came into being on 31 August 1937. It was a most memorable day in the annals of the Madras Legislature marking a new era of political progress. Both the Houses of the Legislature met in a joint session at the old Senate Buildings. Majority of the legislators being Congressmen were in spotless white *Khadar* costumes and Gandhi caps.

Rajaji who, amongst other subjects, held the crucial portfolio of Finance, did the work of the other Ministers also. Prodigious worker that he was, he meticulously examined all the matters submitted to him and carried through at the same time numerous interviews and public engagements.<sup>2</sup> When Gandhiji asked him to let others do their work and not to try to mind others' portfolios Rajaji replied that he had not acquired the art of controlling his *swabhava* (one's nature).<sup>3</sup>

Rajaji's choice of his Council of Ministers was generally accepted to be good. He faced no trouble from them as most of them were entirely dependent on him. The only man in the Cabinet who had the boldness to contest the Premier's authority was T. Prakasam. He was the only "real nuisance" in the Madras Ministry.<sup>4</sup>

Satyamurti who magnanimously withdrew his candidature to enable Rajaji to contest and win the elections, found no berth in the Ministry. It was a significant omission. When the Congress was invited to form the Ministry, Rajaji assured Satyamurti, who was leaving for Delhi to attend the Central Assembly session, that he would be included in the Ministry and nominated to the Upper House. The promise was not kept up. The ostensible reason was that Satyamurti's presence was much more necessary at Delhi where he had already earned his reputation as a Parliamentarian *par excellence*.<sup>5</sup> One is strongly inclined to attribute all this to flagrant ingratitude to the man who had gracefully withdrawn from the contest in favour of Rajaji. This supreme political sacrifice has won Satyamurti everlasting glory in the "annals of patriotic renunciations."<sup>6</sup> It correspondingly earned Rajaji the displeasure of Satyamurti's associates, chiefly Kamaraj Nadar.



Another sad feature about the formation of the Ministry which gave rise to some agitation was the inclusion of T.S.S. Rajan in it. He had no doubt a high reputation for honesty, independence and straightforwardness. But Rajan was a person whose defiance of the TNCC mandate in the election of the Chairman of Trichinopoly Municipality had been condemned by Rajaji himself in August 1936 and against whom disciplinary action had been taken.\* The very appointment was questionable as Rajan who was first nominated by the Governor to the Upper House under the Act was later offered a Ministership. This was denounced by many Congressmen as not in keeping with the traditions of Responsible Government to include in a Provincial Ministry, one who was nominated by the British Governor to the Upper House. Justifying Rajan's inclusion in the Ministry, Rajaji said that he did so on a "stroke of inspiration" and that his non-inclusion would have been "suicidal".<sup>7</sup> S.V. Ramaswamy, Secretary of the Dharmapuram District Board Congress Party, gave a caste colour to it because Rajan was an Iyengar like Rajaji and accused Rajaji of sectarianism. Men of E.V. Ramasami Naicker's line of thinking accused the National Congress itself, of which the Tamil Nad Congress was only a branch, of Aryanising the south.<sup>8</sup>

The rudest shock to many congressmen themselves had been the induction of S. Ramanathan in the Ministry by Rajaji. An active self-respector until 1935, Ramanathan had employed the most intemperate and filthy language in attacking the Hindu religion. Offer of Ministership to him was more an act of personal favour on the part of the Premier to his one time colleague in the TNCC. His portfolio (Public Information) was, however, a very light one.<sup>9</sup> Erskine once remarked that he had no real department to run. But there were rumours that along with Varadachari, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Ramanathan formed one of the Inner Cabinet.

### *Political Prisoners Released:*

The very first question raised by Rajaji after assumption of office as Premier was the release of political prisoners. On account of the cordiality that existed between him and the Governor, the matter

\* He successfully put up his own candidate in opposition to the official Congress nominee. Ultimately, however, he resigned from the TNCC.

was settled in Madras in the smoothest manner possible.\* Rajaji's attitude in this regard was pronounced by the Governor as "definitely encouraging", although the latter was perturbed over the release of those convicted for crimes of violence but who later disavowed violence.<sup>10</sup> Officials tried to block the release of some. But Rajaji had his way.<sup>11</sup>

In the very first month of his tenure as Premier, as many as 38 political prisoners were discharged. The Tamil labourer Perumal who was transported to Andamans for his involvement in the so-called South-Indian Railway Conspiracy case of June-July 1928, was released unconditionally.\*\*<sup>12</sup> By the remissions granted to prisoners, the Ministry's expenditure in jails was reduced. Another welcome reformatory measure in this field was the addition of buttermilk to the diet of prisoners.<sup>13</sup>

The other political problems which demanded Rajaji's immediate attention and which he solved quickly were: repeal of emergency powers, lifting of the ban on illegal associations and

\* The Congress Ministries in the United Provinces and Bihar resigned on 15 February 1938 on the issue of the release of all political prisoners. A deadlock ensued. Ultimately, by a compromise agreement, it was decided to release the political prisoners but in stages. Thereupon, the Ministries in both the Provinces resumed office.

\*\* The South Indian Railway Labour Union organised a strike to thwart the Railway Management's move to effect retrenchment and modernisation. The management planned to achieve both by closing the existing workshops at Nagapatam, Podanur and Trichinopoly and concentrating on construction work at Golden Rock on the outskirts of Trichinopoly. The main reason for this move was that the employees of the workshops had always taken a leading role in organising strikes. The Agent, P. Rothera was extended all possible help in his move by the Madras Government which was greatly perturbed over the support which the powerful Railway Labour Union was receiving from the two communists M. Singaravelu Chetty and Mukundlal Sirkar of Bengal. A lock-out was declared first. Then charging the labourers with criminal deeds including a conspiracy against it, the Madras Government brought in the police to render the strike ineffective. It was no difficult task for the Railway Management and the Madras Government jointly to bring the strike to a rapid end. Subsequent judicial findings, however, showed that there was no pre-meditated plan of violence and sabotage on the part of the strikers.

Having broken the Union and its opposition to the proposed retrenchment and reorganisation of workshops, the Government went about arresting the strikers including M. Singaravelu Chetty and Mukundlal Sirkar. Prominent among those who argued in vain the cause of the labourers were Madura George Joseph, Satyamurti, Nugent Grant, K.S. Krishnaswamy Iyengar and N.S. Ramaswamy Iyer. Chetty and Sirkar were awarded 10 years rigorous imprisonment each. Labourer Perumal was sentenced to life imprisonment. He was the first Tamil to be transported to Andamans.



activities, and return of the securities taken from different newspapers.<sup>14</sup>

### *Introducing Prohibition:*

The first major reform of the Congress Ministry was “Prohibition” which was a much needed but long neglected reform. This socio-ethical reform had been a passion with Rajaji for over two decades. The offer of Premiership was thus a Godsend for this enthusiast for prohibition. He was bent on providing a solution to the drink evil while he had the opportunity. Though Prohibition had not figured in the electoral Manifesto of the Congress, its Ministries were instructed to impose prohibition throughout their Provinces within three years, notwithstanding the serious loss of revenue it would involve. The Congress Ministries “may enforce immediate prohibition by making education self-supporting instead of paying for it from the liquor revenue. This (may) appear a startling proposition, but I hold it perfectly feasible and eminently reasonable”, said Gandhiji.<sup>15</sup> In a conversation with Governor Erskine, Rajaji told him that if he could have it entirely his own way, he deemed it possible that the whole Presidency would go dry in ten years. However, in the context of his colleagues asking for more money for their departments, he feared it would take longer than that.<sup>16</sup>

Within two months of assuming office, the Ministry succeeded in passing “The Prohibition Act” in September 1937. It sought to penalise the manufacture of, traffic in, and consumption of liquor and intoxicating drugs in the areas in which it was introduced. Its easy passage in the legislature caused surprise to many. The *Madras Mail* was astonished that so revolutionary a measure was passed without a division and attributed it to the sense of “impotency” which had destroyed the virility of the Opposition.<sup>17</sup>

To begin with, the Act became operative in the whole of Rajaji’s home district of Salem on 1 October 1937. It was to be extended to Chittoor and Cuddappah districts on 1 October 1938 and to North Arcot district on 1 October 1939 so that prohibition would be in force in a compact area of 23,819 square miles—about one fifth of the total area of the Presidency. The consequent loss to the exchequer would amount in a full year to a sum of about two-thirds of a crore of rupees.<sup>18</sup>

Rajaji who was generally partial to the British, had no hesitation

in exempting the British officers of the ICS from this rule while dealing with such a gigantic problem. This was one of the concessions he most willingly extended to the British officers. As a result, Madras had a system whereby permits to possess and consume foreign liquor were granted by Government to individuals who lived either temporarily or permanently in districts that went dry under the Prohibition Act. This provision was in the original Bill at the instance of the Governor in order to protect the rights of the Europeans. The Governor had given orders that any European applying for permit should get one. In Salem no difficulty was experienced in enforcing prohibition. The Collector and the District Superintendent of Police — both Europeans — had preferred not to take out foreign liquor permits.<sup>19</sup> Griffith ICS, whose very first posting was to Salem as Assistant Collector, felt it would be very awkward if the officials tried and enforced laws on the people which they did not obey themselves. So, as a first sacrifice to the Congress and the “New Spirit”, Griffith and a few more of the ICS officers of the Salem District went teetotal. “It will be good to my pocket too,” wrote Griffith.<sup>20</sup>

To those who were not teetotallers the facilities proposed by Rajaji were acceptable. They could go to a neighbouring wet area for a drink. Clubs could apply for licences to keep liquor for sale to permit-holding members. Churches were authorised to obtain and keep wine for religious purposes. Hospitals could keep brandy. Licences were given to tap trees for sweet toddy — a harmless non-intoxicating beverage. This right was not abused. This was proof of the intelligent manner in which Rajaji launched prohibition in the Presidency. In his zeal for reform, he had not ignored the question of the unemployment of the tappers on account of prohibition. Tapping did not stop at all. Only what they tapped under the Prohibition regime would be sweet toddy which would be converted into *gur* (*jaggery*) instead of liquor. The combined vigilance of the public and the police successfully solved most of the difficulties in implementing this policy.<sup>21</sup>

Special mention deserves to be made of Dixon and Thompson (both of the ICS) who were determined to make prohibition in the district a success. The public was intrigued to see Dixon, a British, executing a very un-British policy. The prestige of the Congress rose.<sup>22</sup> Cases of illicit distillation and illicit tapping of toddy palm were much less than in the previous (wet) year. According to Dixon it brought cheer to many a family as the purse of the head of the



family was not so completely attenuated as before. A European who violated the dry law was fined Rs. 500 by a Magistrate. But Rajaji—though a zealot in the cause of prohibition—found the penalty excessive and reduced it to five rupees.<sup>23</sup> The finding of a Madras University study of the first year's working of the dry law was that over 2,00,000 persons who were formerly addicts were no longer so. A similar study undertaken by the Annamalai University reported "a phenomenal improvement".<sup>24</sup>

To ensure the success of the prohibition in the Chittoor and Cuddappah districts where it was to be introduced in October 1938, the Premier contemplated the transfer of certain British officials from the two districts. It was agreeable to the Governor also. But the Acting Viceroy Brabourne raised objections to the transfer of officials out of turn. Erskine took pains to convince him that in Madras there was no such thing as a normal term of duty in any district; and that officers were moved about all the periods of the year quite regardless of the length of time they might have served in an area, if the exigencies of the service so required. There would, therefore, be no difficulty in altering the existing postings.<sup>25</sup> But Brabourne was not amenable to reason. He conveyed the directive of Zetland that the Governor should warn the Premier against transfer of officers from the aforesaid two districts merely because they were not teetotallers.<sup>26</sup>

Rajaji emphasised that he would use no compulsion and would merely appeal to the better nature of the district officers concerned. But it was felt at higher circles that an appeal by a superior was tantamount to an order and was generally so regarded. By his appeals, the Premier would place conscientious officers in a very difficult position and the final result would be almost the same as if he had given an order. Since their prohibition law provided for the use of permits to certain persons, there was no reason why an officer who scrupulously observed the law, though himself enjoying the privilege it gave him, should not be able to enforce the law on others with complete success.<sup>27</sup> Eventually Rajaji dropped the transfer proposal. This flexible attitude of Rajaji eased everything. The districts of Chittoor and Cuddappah in the Telugu area and North Arcot in the Tamil region also gained from prohibition though perhaps to a lesser degree than Salem.

Viewed from the right perspective, Rajaji was fully justified in making the aforesaid allowances to the British officers. Even Gandhiji who looked upon revenue from drinks as an extremely

degrading form of taxation, ruled out any suggestion to impose prohibition on Europeans. He even wrote in an article that "Foreign liquors in prescribed quantity may be imported for the use of Europeans who cannot and will not do without their drink".<sup>28</sup> In the frigid zone alcoholic drink was regarded as a necessity. It formed part of the meal of its inhabitants. It was, therefore, impossible to lay down a universal rule for all humans and for all climes that drink was an evil. Besides, the chief objective of the policy of prohibition was to wean the poor Indian labourers and the Harijans from this evil.

For the success of the Scheme in the four districts, Prohibition Committees consisting of non-officials were formed in every taluk. The Taluk Committee gave information about violation of Prohibition to the police; reported every month to the Collector on the working of the Act in its taluk; maintained contact with the Village Prohibition Committee; kept a watch on places where breaches of the Act might take place; and, above all, organised amusements and counter-attractions to drink and thus encouraged thrift. Types of amusements organised were *bhajans*, *kathaprasangams*, folk dances, street dramas, playing gramophones etc. A campaign for the revival of rural sports was inaugurated. Rural uplift and recreation schools were started in various centres in the dry areas with a view to providing training for the young men as "village guides" to carry on rural uplift work.<sup>29</sup> In September 1938 when the Munich decision\* was announced, Rajaji was in Cuddappah "witnessing the switch to dryness of a new district".<sup>30</sup>

### *Helping Harijans:*

Next to prohibition the cause of the down-trodden was dear to the heart of Rajaji. He knew that as a first step in this direction, temples had to be thrown open to the so-called "untouchables".

\* By the Munich Pact signed on 30 September 1938, England and France had jointly betrayed Czechoslovakia. This issue was discussed for eleven days by the AICC at Delhi in September-October 1938. Towards the end of it, Gandhiji wrote: "Europe has sold her soul for the sake of a seven days' earthly existence. The peace that Europe gained at Munich is a triumph of violence." Saddened by the fate of the Czechs, Gandhiji suggested that they should offer non-violent resistance. He urged the Czechs to refuse to obey Hitler's will and perish unarmed in the attempt. He even suggested the lines on which a Czech Satyagrahi should act when confronted by the German Army.



His Government was doing its best to educate public opinion on this revolutionary measure. The atmosphere was far more conducive than ever before with the progress of the Temple-entry campaign in Malabar district and Cochin State. The Executive Committee of the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh requested the Governments of Madras and Cochin to declare open all Hindu temples within its jurisdiction to the Harijans.<sup>31</sup> But the Government of Madras was different from that of Cochin where the Hindu ruler owned all the temples. It was within his right to open them to the Harijans as they were open to the *savarna* Hindus. But the Madras Government was responsible to the people of the Presidency who represented all classes and creeds. Temples could be thrown open to Harijans only by the Trustees either of their own accord or at the instance of the *savarna* devotees who would visit particular temples. Of course, the Provincial legislatures could bring about this reform by passing enabling legislation. Its passage would not be tough as the new Congress Ministry was pledged to Harijan uplift.

In January 1938, M.C. Rajah expressed his desire to move a Temple-Entry Bill which would give the worshippers the right by majority vote to open a temple for Harijans. Rajaji promised support for the measure. He even drafted the Bill for Rajah. But when it was moved by Rajah in August, Rajaji was not in favour of it.\* Instead, a legislative measure known as the Malabar Temple-Entry Act was passed. This would facilitate free entry of the Depressed Classes into temples in Malabar if the step was favoured by the majority of the caste Hindus in the particular revenue taluk, in which the temple was situated.<sup>32</sup> Rajah felt deceived and complained to Gandhiji that the Harijans were exercised over the issue of temple-entry and were “contemplating repudiation of the Poona Pact”.<sup>33</sup> Gandhiji advised him to bear with Rajaji assuring that the Harijans had no better friend than Rajaji.<sup>34</sup> Gandhiji again advised him in a subsequent letter that the whole Movement of temple entry was one of conviction of the *Sanatani* heart. Rajah must declare his whole-

\* A few days prior to the consideration of the Bill by the Assembly, Rajaji decided that the legislation should apply only to the Malabar district. The reasons for this sudden but cautious decision of the Premier were not far to seek. He was already filled with great despair from all sides whatwith the anti-Hindi agitation and the fierce criticism over the Debt Relief Act. He certainly did not want at this juncture the “guns of orthodoxy booming at him”. He chose Malabar because it was adjacent to Travancore where the young Maharaja had already opened the temples to Harijans. (Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story—1937–72*, p: 33).

hearted support to the Premier in this mighty religious reform and make the Movement a thorough success.<sup>35</sup> Rajah did so by extending his support to the Malabar Temple-Entry Bill.

On 13 June 1939, the Tamil Nad Provincial Harijan Temple-Entry Conference was held at Madura with Rameshwari Devi\* in the chair. Rajaji found at this Conference, that a majority of the priests and trustees of the famed Sri Meenakshi Temple of Madura were ready to throw it open to Harijans. Nobody would have thought then that in three weeks' time Rajaji would achieve what was considered to be impossible of achievement. The "wonderful event" happened on 8 July 1939 when with the help of Vaidyanatha Iyer of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, Madura, and his co-workers, a party consisting of Harijans and caste-Hindus entered that temple. They were admitted by the Trustees to its inner precincts which were hitherto preserved for Brahmans. The Harijans offered puja amidst the rejoicings of the Hindu population of the town.<sup>36</sup> Gandhiji wrote: "It is a great event in the campaign against untouchability and the Movement for the opening of temples to Harijans. The Proclamation opening the State temples of Travancore was no doubt a very big step. But it was the prerogative of the Maharaja. He had in his Dewan a wise adviser. The Maharaja, the Maharani and the Dewan brought about the transformation. But the opening of the celebrated temple of Madura is a greater event in that it is the popular will that has brought about the happy consummation. It reflects a decided conversion of the temple-goers of the Meenakshi temple".<sup>37</sup>

Though the *Sanatanist* opposition had not been extensive, the Trustees had a tough time with them initially. They were encouraged in their step of throwing open the temples to Harijans by the Premier's assurance of legislation within eight days.<sup>38</sup> But the unavoidable delay in bringing about the legislation caused them considerable embarrassment. The orthodox among the Hindus began filing civil and criminal suits against the temple authorities and social reformers. A criminal case was initiated against the temple's Executive Officer. There was a demand for a purificatory ceremony. Natesa Iyer\*\* sent a harrowing wire to Gandhiji charging that the party entered the Meenakshi temple stealthily and that the opening of the temple was in defiance of public opinion. Gandhiji wired

\*Vice-President, All India Harijan Sevak Sangh; belonged to the Nehru family.

\*\*President, *Varnashrama Sangh*, Madura.



back to say that the contents of Natesa Iyer's telegram were "unbelievable" and that he should not impede "long over due reform".<sup>39</sup> Natesa Iyer asserted telegraphically that every word of his wire was true and that Gandhiji could make enquiries from Minister Ramanathan and others.<sup>40</sup> The Minister, however, denied the charge. On the whole, the *sanatanist* opposition had not been extensive.<sup>41</sup>

The Ministry was over anxious to bring in the necessary legislation but nothing could be done till the legislature met in August. The Premier, therefore, requested the Governor to promulgate a temporary Ordinance on the lines of the Indemnity Bill they had drafted to give immediate and complete protection to the reformers against vexatious suits and proceedings. Although he had personally no objection to promulgating an Ordinance, Erskine sought the Viceroy's instructions.<sup>42</sup> In fact he was anxious not to stand in the way of emancipation of Harijans. When the Viceroy delayed sending his reply, the Governor wired that if the British authorities refused to issue this order "we shall be laying ourselves open to the charges and with some reason, that we are interfering in the Hindu religious dispute and backing up the *sanatanist* Brahmans as against the Harijans and their sympathisers".<sup>43</sup>

The Viceroy did grant the Governor the necessary permission to go ahead with the Ordinance. Accordingly, an Ordinance was promulgated in terms of the Indemnity Bill to take effect immediately.<sup>44</sup> It indemnified temple officials who had already opened and might open their temples to Harijans with the permission of the Government. Subsequently the Madras Temple-Entry Authorisation and Indemnity Bill was passed in the Madras Legislative Council on 7 August 1939. The Act empowered the Trustees of Temples to throw them open to Harijans subject to approval of Government. This was a general measure which applied to any temple in the Province. Rajaji owed his victory in carrying this Bill to the support extended by overwhelming Hindu opinion.

Following the ordinance the other temples in the Madura, Tanjore and other districts were thrown open to Harijans. The temple at Courtallam (Tinnevely district) also followed suit. The Vaishnava Brahman Premier did not however meet with immediate success in the case of Vaishnava shrines. The temples at Srirangam and Tirupati did not open. T.T. Krishnamachari was unkind and unfair when he likened the indemnity measure to Ghazni's temple raids. In the Legislative Council, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri criticised the Premier's act as an "indirect back-door method". But he failed to

spell out what the other method was. Rajaji stuck to his guns. He said "there is no use of my being a Minister if I cannot protect the people who brought this about".<sup>45</sup>

The Removal of the Civil Disabilities Act was another important measure which aimed at the amelioration of the Harijans. The Act provided that no Harijan could be prevented merely by reason of his caste from enjoying any social or public amenity to which other castes of Hindus had access or which was maintained for the use of the public from out of State or local funds; and that no court of law should recognise any such disability. A sum of Rs. 11.24 lakhs was spent in 1938–39 on the amelioration of the condition of the Harijans. In 1939–40, a sum of Rs. 12.43 lakhs was earmarked for it.

The Government refused recognition and aid to schools which denied admission to the Harijans. Scholarships were granted to the scheduled caste pupils for elementary, secondary, collegiate, special, commercial, professional and industrial education. No fee was charged for them in the elementary schools. In the arts and professional colleges they could obtain half remission of fees on production of poverty certificate. There were also separate schools run for Scheduled Caste children where they were supplied books, slates etc., freely; small grants for clothing for deserving pupils were also given. Deserving Scheduled Caste pupils were exempted even from paying the examination fees for the SSLC and other public examinations.

Members of this caste were given concessions in the matter of employment in Government service by the reservation of one out of every twelve appointments; by raising the age limit to 27; and by lowering the general educational standard in their case. If a scheduled caste candidate was an under-graduate or graduate, no age limit would be insisted upon.

The Government helped this caste to acquire also house sites by bearing half the costs itself and by collecting the balance in easy instalments. Considerable extent of land was reserved for and assigned to this caste in addition to the unreserved area for which also they could apply. There were co-operative societies specially organised for their benefit. Through these societies, they could obtain loans for agricultural and general purposes and secure leases of government lands. An Advisory Committee was set up in each district to co-ordinate the work of the District Committees.<sup>46</sup>

Surprisingly some were not satisfied with these concessions. Some Congress members themselves were unhappy about the



allotment of only one seat in every twelve appointments to the Harijans. They wanted the Premier to give two seats in the Communal G.O. and to issue mandatory rules that even in the District Boards and Municipal Services their share should be on a similar basis, if not more.<sup>47</sup>

*To the Peasants' rescue:*

Rajaji was the first to bring the Debt Relief Act to help poor indebted agriculturists who were suffering under the stranglehold of usurious money lenders. Originally in 1937, an ordinance was contemplated to call a moratorium in regard to agricultural debts but this was abandoned later. Instead, a Debt Relief Act was passed on a comprehensive scale in March 1938 with the following objectives: to scale down the debts of agriculturists; to reduce the rate of interest on their future debts; and to write off the arrears of rent due to Zamindars, Janmis and other landlords.<sup>48</sup> Up to the end of March 1939, debts amounting to Rs. 2,86,67,677-0-4 were scaled down by courts to Rs. 1,52,09,419-3-4. A sum of Rs. 50 lakhs was set apart in the budget for 1939–40, towards the grant of loans to agriculturists to pay off the scaled down debts. To facilitate the debtors to pay off the debts as scaled down in the Agriculturists Relief Act, Debts Conciliation Boards were set up for each revenue division under the Debt Conciliation Act of 1936.<sup>49</sup> It was reported that for the 82 months ending December 1944, the total amount of debt for relief on which applications were filed before the Debt Conciliation Committees was Rs. 938.80 lakhs; and it was reduced to Rs. 448.06 lakhs. This amount was exclusive of private settlement in terms of the Act.<sup>50</sup>

While nobody could question the soundness of the declared objective of the measure, it was anybody's guess what grave anomalies would result from the actual working of this Act. As *The Hindu* wrote: "It is very doubtful whether the agriculturist will find it easy to get loans hereafter on any terms from the sources to which he has hitherto turned and which have responded to his need . . . . . The difficulties of the agriculturist may multiply intolerably. . . . . The fact that side by side with scaling down no provision is made that would enable the debtor to pay the reduced debt if it is demanded is one of the most serious defects of the measure".<sup>51</sup>

The measure also proceeded on the wrong premise that all

lenders were men of opulence—like Zamindars and Janmis. Of the spate of letters sent to the press criticising the Act, the one sent by a young widow from Vijayawada was the most revealing. The widow with two minor children and “crippled by TB” lost all the dues her husband had accumulated with her debtor from 1929 till October 1937. She wrote: “He (the debtor) never paid a pie towards interest or principal. He is a small landlord protected by the bill as an agriculturist. . . . . Now for all my consideration I have to lose my thrifty savings to a debtor hundred times better off than myself”.<sup>52</sup>

This measure came in for much criticism even from the Congress party. But Rajaji braved it all. The Bill was sent to the Viceroy with a note prepared by Boag giving a full resume of the effects of the Bill.<sup>53</sup> The Southern India Chamber of Commerce desired the Bill to be referred to the Federal Court for its opinion which annoyed Rajaji.<sup>54</sup> Ultimately, however, the Premier had his way and the Bill was passed. Recalling Rajaji’s speech made in 1938 to defend this Bill against severe criticism in the press, V.K. Narasimhan said in 1971, that it was a masterly performance. Without using any economic jargon or citing massive figures, Rajaji made out a persuasive case for his measure.<sup>55</sup>

Credit facilities for the agriculturists were increased also by the reorganisation of Co-operative Credit Societies for securing reasonable price for agricultural produce. The Government also increased the guarantee of the debentures of the Central Land Mortgage Bank to Rs. 200 lakhs.<sup>56</sup>

Certain other notable measures of the Rajaji Ministry included: (1) better arrangements for rural water supply for which an initial grant of Rs.25 lakhs was provided with a recurring annual provision of about Rs. 10 lakhs; (2) organisation of Honorary Medical Services associating private medical practitioners with civil hospital work; (3) collection of unemployment statistics by the Ministry of Labour with a view to levying a tax on the educated employed for the purpose of bettering the lot of the former; (4) appointment of a co-operative committee which produced a comprehensive report on reorganising the whole movement; and (5) a decision that public utility concerns should be run and owned by the State.<sup>57</sup>

The special favours extended to the poor included land revenue concessions; famine, flood and cyclone relief; village reconstruction which consisted of water supply, rural medical scheme



and revival of rural games; tenancy reform; public health measures; educational facilities; and religious and charitable endowments.

The Ministry, however, could not fulfil its main election pledge of reduction in land tax.<sup>58</sup> To find money for all the expenditures, the Government resorted both to new taxation and to economy.

#### *A) New Taxes Levied:*

The two major sources of income for Government were land revenue and excise. Out of the total revenue of 16 crores of rupees these two yielded 9 crores. Since excise weighed heavily on the poor, the Congress administration brought about a re-allocation of the tax burden by a two-fold policy. The first was by giving up the taxation of the poorest through the prohibition policy. The second was by imposing fresh taxes which would offset the loss of revenue which had hitherto come from the poorest sections of the population. These taxes were so designed as to weigh upon each individual in proportion to her or his capacity to pay. Legislative sanctions were obtained to levy the following taxes:

1) The Madras Electricity Duty Act (February 1939) imposed on licensees in the province, a duty of six pies on every unit of energy sold by them at a price of more than two annas per unit. Though the tax was primarily payable by the licensee, the Government permitted the licensee to reimburse himself from the consumer.

2) The Madras Sales of Motor Spirit Taxation Act (February 1939) provided for a levy of a tax on petrol at the rate of one anna and six pies per gallon for petrol and six pies per gallon for motor spirit other than petrol.

3) The Madras Entertainment Tax Act (March 1939) provided for a tax on entertainments ranging from two pies to two rupees.

4) The General Sales Tax Act (March 1939) which aroused a good deal of criticism was the most important and innovative measure. It was also the most permanent reform of the Ministry. It imposed on every dealer a tax of Rs. 5 every month if his annual turn over exceeded Rs. 10,000 but not Rs. 20,000, and a tax of one half of one per cent of such turn over if his turn over exceeded Rs. 20,000. This new kind of tax had not been introduced anywhere in Asia until Rajaji levied it in Madras in 1939. Administratively this tax was the simplest that could be devised. And it caused the least amount of trouble to the tax-payer. It was hailed by economists as “a stroke of genius”.<sup>59</sup> It is still operative, earning the state

governments crores of rupees. Though Rajaji's ingenuity was admired even by his opponents, the new financial innovation was fiercely opposed by the Indian and European merchants, the Justices and T.T. Krishnamachari. Rajaji justified the new levy which shifted the burden "from the poor to the not so poor, from the peasantry to the urbanites".<sup>60</sup>

5) The Madras Sale of Cloth Act.

6) The Madras Tobacco Act.

7) The terms and conditions of the Betting Tax were so revised as to yield more revenue.

The cumulative revenue derived during the fiscal year 1939-40 from all these new taxes and the old ones which were enhanced was Rs. 79.34 lakhs.<sup>61</sup>

The Congress Government also took a decision to discontinue the system of commutation of pensions.<sup>62</sup>

Criticisms, some mild and some severe, were levelled against the various taxes imposed by the Rajaji Government. However, there was general agreement that they were resorted to to balance the budget. E.V. Ramaswami Naicker was perhaps the only opponent who discerned even in the taxation policy a ruse of the "crafty" ruling Brahman to crush the prosperity of the non-Brahmans. According to him the new taxes affected only the non-Brahmans who primarily constituted the business sections. He wanted the Government to tax the professional earnings of the doctors, lawyers, engineers and owners of coffee clubs who were mostly Brahmans. "We invested the *purohitas* with ruling powers and now suffer for it" he said.<sup>63</sup> It was a pity that Naicker, a one time ardent Congressite who zealously advocated the temperance movement, had no word of appreciation even for the Ministry's prohibition policy.

If Rajaji could easily secure the passage of these measures, it was because he was noted for his integrity and sagacity. The Presidency of Madras was very fortunate in this regard. In Allahabad, the High Court decided that the Tenancy legislation of the United Provinces legislature was *ultra-vires* of the Provincial Legislature. The halting judgment of the Bombay High Court in the case of the House Tax was another case. Yet another instance was the decision of the Bihar High Court against the Debt Legislation of that province. Invariably, the decisions of the High Courts of India on the validity of Provincial legislations in respect of matters that came up before them, had been adverse to the Provincial legislatures. The only exception was the Full Bench Decision



of the Madras High Court in the Agriculturists' Relief Act. It was perhaps this that prompted the Advocate General to request Rajaji to make a suggestion in this respect to the Chief Justice of India. It was to the effect that the Federal Court should adopt a uniform rule of giving notice to every Province whenever a provincial legislation was attacked on the ground that the legislation was *ultra vires* of the powers of the Provincial legislature. "I am sure, he (the Chief Justice of India) will give your suggestion the best consideration", wrote Alladi Krishnaswamy Iyer to Rajaji after the latter had resigned.<sup>64</sup>

### *B. Adopting Frugalities:*

Reduction of high salaries was one of the main planks of the Congress Ministry. The Congress resolved that no Minister should draw a salary of more than Rs. 500 per mensem.\* Rajaji tried to effect savings by asking the Services to a voluntary cut of ten percent of their pay. The proposed cuts would affect the Provincial and Subordinate and not the All India Services. All persons appointed to the affected Services after 1 April 1937 were to come to the new scale. The existing incumbents would continue on their existing pay but on promotion to a higher service or post should come on to the new scale.<sup>65</sup>

Since an appeal to the Services for a voluntary cut in their salaries would attract the Governor's special responsibility under Section 52(1) (c) of the new Act the Viceroy advised Erskine to hold up action in this matter.<sup>66</sup> The Secretary of State whose advice was sought, wired that any proposal to issue an appeal to the Services whether All India, Provincial or Subordinate, for a voluntary surrender of pay must be firmly resisted. Thereupon, the Premier cited an instance when the Madras Government adopted the method of reduction in emoluments on promotion in 1933.<sup>67</sup> In view of this, it became impossible for the Governor to resist the Congress demand although he was personally against any reduction in emoluments for the promoted officers.<sup>68</sup>

It must be borne in mind that Rajaji was never known to be an enthusiast of the Dearness Allowance Schemes either. He wanted to bring down the prices so that all sections of people benefited and not any one section alone.

\* In the Interim Ministry the Chief Minister drew a salary of Rs. 3000 + 500 and the other Ministers Rs. 2500 + 400.

It is disheartening to find that Rajaji made the request for cut in salary only to the Indian members of the Services including the ICS and the Police, and not to the British officers. Shockingly, he expressed the view that the latter's salaries were not too high since they were foreigners whose style of living was different from that of Indians. He even told the Chief Secretary that, if it became necessary, he would defend British salaries in the Legislative Assembly.<sup>69</sup> Such utterances mightily pleased the British administrators not excluding Erskine who had always entertained the notion that the salaries drawn by the Indians in higher Services were "ridiculous" and "exorbitant". Rajaji thus annulled in one stroke the labours of many Indian leaders over the years to raise the status of Indian officers. Indian representatives on various committees strove hard for decades to importune the Government to give equal pay for equal work be they British or Indian officials. Rajaji did not deem it derogatory to Indian prestige that they should be placed on a lower scale than their British counterparts.

Rajaji showed this extreme partiality to British officers at the expense of his own countrymen. His denial of the legitimate rights due to the Indian members of the Provincial and Subordinate Services in order to reduce the cost of administration betrayed a "meanness" and a readiness to "perpetuate what are really injustices".<sup>70</sup> Rajaji was unexpectedly generous in many cases where the aliens were involved. For example, he agreed to his Government bearing part of the cost of a reserved carriage to Bombay for the retiring Chief Secretary.<sup>71</sup> It was noted earlier that he reduced the penalty of Rs. 500 to Rs. 5 for violation of the Prohibition Act because the accused was an Englishman. These are small but painful betrayals of the interests and prestige of the Indians.

### *Hindi made Compulsory:*

The most contentious issue which plunged the Premier into endless troubles—troubles which continued even after the resignation of the Congress Ministry, was the compulsory teaching of Hindustani\* in schools. Rajaji's Hindustani policy was formulated in the best of intentions as he genuinely felt that a knowledge of this language would stand any southerner in good stead in securing

\* Rajaji preferred to use the name Hindustani to Hindi as he wanted to stress that many Urdu words would be part of its vocabulary.



jobs anywhere in India. Rajaji wanted books prepared by Jamia Millia Islamia (National Muslim University) in Delhi, for pupils in Madras.<sup>72</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, who was delighted at the significant step taken by Rajaji in familiarising Hindi, wrote to Purushottamdas Tandon to send Rajaji Hindi and Urdu primers.<sup>73</sup>

Initially, Hindustani was introduced in 125 schools in standards six to eight giving the pupils the option to learn it in either script—the *nagari* (Sanskrit) or Urdu. Though Hindustani was compulsory for the students of these three standards, failure in it could not block promotion to a higher class. As Rajaji said “. . . . . it is chutney on leaf, taste it or leave it alone”.<sup>74</sup> This condition took away the onus of compulsion from it. The study of Hindustani for an hour a day certainly made no strain on the students. Neither the students who were directly affected by the introduction of the new language nor their parents had any objection to such a constructive measure. It did not interfere with the students’ study of English or Tamil. The cry that the “mother tongue is in danger” had, therefore, no substance. In fact, many welcomed the new measure. This receptive attitude of the public was communicated by many Head Masters of Schools in their letter to the Director of Public Instruction.<sup>75</sup> The latter wrote to the Education Minister that the parents and students had no objection and there was, therefore, no need to back out of the position already taken. He even stated that students were flocking to the schools where Hindustani was being taught. Out of the hundred Schools the D.P.I. addressed, only two raised any difficulty with regard to introducing Hindustani and these two were missionary girls’ schools.<sup>76</sup>

Rajaji, however, ignored two very crucial factors. Firstly, anything compulsory would be unpalatable. The element of compulsion irked some Congressmen themselves and became the topic of adverse comments in many quarters. Karumuthu Thiagaraja Chetty, a loyal Congressman, wrote to Rajaji that he was unconvinced by the arguments advanced in favour of compulsory Hindi.<sup>77</sup> Secondly, a sensitive measure such as the one brought into operation, could never be accepted from a Brahman Minister in a province riven by caste politics. The non-Congress leaders of the Presidency had always associated Hindi with Aryan culture and anything Aryan was Brahman for them. Rajaji had unwittingly afforded them the much longed for opportunity to decry the Congress Ministry headed by a Brahman and to demand its ouster. Introduction of Hindustani as a compulsory subject was charac-

terised as an imposition of an Aryan language on an unwilling Dravidian people to perpetuate the Brahman *Raj*.

An anti-Hindi agitation was launched on a large scale although there was no need for it. Because there was no objection to the introduction of compulsory Hindi in schools either from the students or their parents. The initiative for the agitation did not come from the Justice party. That party itself was in doldrums after the elections of 1937. Its performance in the Legislative Assembly was regarded as execrable. Very often its leaders in the Assembly—Muthiah Chetty and Mohammad Usman—voted with the Congress much to the annoyance of other members.<sup>78</sup> The opposition to Hindi came first from the Tamil districts and Tamil academics. They were later joined by K.V. Reddy Naidu, Pannirselvam and Ramaswami Naicker. After his entry into the anti-Hindi movement, Naicker dominated it completely. An anti-Hindi League was formed. Naicker's Tamil papers *Vidutalai* and *Kudiarasu* acted as unofficial organs of the League. The *Sunday Observer*\* and, to a lesser degree, the *Justice* gave publicity to the activities of the League.<sup>79</sup> When the agitation became well-organised it was assisted by the Justicites and to some extent also by the local leaders of the Muslim League.<sup>80</sup> The rank and file of the anti-Hindi propagandists based their appeal on definitely communal lines and strove to promote virulent anti-Brahman feeling.<sup>81</sup> An ex-political prisoner, Swami Shanmukhananda, made many intemperate speeches which were marked by scurrilous personal attacks on the members of the Government.<sup>82</sup>

The demonstrations, which were mostly street agitations in the different parts of the Presidency under the lead of the self-respecters, proved explicitly that they were all factitious and unreal. They were demonstrations not against the introduction of Hindi but against the Ministers as such. They were intended to render the functioning of a particular Cabinet difficult if not impossible. Such a thing could not be permitted without endangering progress in the direction of paliamentary institutions and government by majority. Therefore, when the picketing intensified, with young and old people assailing homes and offices and howling imprecations against the Premier and his Council of Ministers, Rajaji resorted to the use of the Criminal Law Amendment Act. Many people were arrested including Ramaswami Naicker, who was sentenced to one

\* A weekly edited by P. Balasubramanian, a Justice Member.



year simple imprisonment.<sup>83</sup> There were loud cries against the application of the aforesaid Act, the chief one being the outburst of K.V. Reddy Naidu against the Congress Ministry. Many Congressmen themselves were sensitive on this point as the Criminal Law Amendment Act was an Act placed on the Statute Book by the fiat of the Governor General against the express wishes of the Central Legislative Assembly. In view of the growing feeling of resentment outside, Patel wanted Rajaji to find out some other means of dealing with the trouble arising from the anti-Hindi demonstration. Patel also referred to the rumours in Congress circles that the High Command was being partial to Rajaji.<sup>84</sup>

Gandhiji was inundated with wires and letters charging the Madras Premier with “terrible misdeeds” in respect of his policy about Hindi and his employment of the Criminal Law Amendment Act for combating the picketing nuisance. Jinnah personally met Gandhiji to complain bitterly of Hindi having been imposed in primary schools in particular areas of Madras.<sup>85</sup> S. Radhakrishnan\* also went to Wardha in December 1938 to persuade Gandhiji to prevail upon Rajaji not to make Hindi compulsory in Madras Schools, as anti-Hindi agitation was on the increase. He suggested that Rajaji should accept a conscience clause, exempting those children whose parents gave in writing that they had a conscientious objection to it, from learning Hindi. Gandhiji who concurred with Radhakrishnan desired Rajaji to give effect to it. “It should not matter to you even though the concession may be interpreted as concession to unreasonable agitation. . . . .”<sup>86</sup> he wrote. Satyamurti notified his opposition to the application of the Criminal Law Amendment Act which was not in keeping with the definite election pledge that the Congress stood for the repeal of all repressive laws. He also emphasised the conscience clause but wanted the Government to insist on the students studying Hindi passing an examination in it as that alone would enable them to be promoted to a higher class.<sup>87</sup>

Gandhiji clarified that the Congress had objection not to the name but to the contents of the Act and even in regard to the latter the objection was not to every word or section of the Act. He was inclined to think from Rajaji’s public declarations that the Act contained a few sections which would suit the new situation the Con-

\* Great Philosopher, author and “world teacher”; Second President of India (1962–67).

gress was facing. If that was the case, Rajaji would be “foolish” not to make use of them and “equally foolish” if he did not summarily repeal forthwith the obnoxious clauses of the Act. Gandhiji said that the Act was “a monster created by the fertile brain of the repressor of the country’s liberty. It was used as such against the Satyagrahis. The sooner, therefore, those clauses go, the better for Rajaji and the country. But let Congressmen beware of hanging their trusted servants before they are tried and found wanting”.<sup>88</sup>

A Press cutting from the *Indian Express* reproducing the comments of the *Indian Social Reformer* against Rajaji’s policy was sent to Vallabhbhai Patel. The following are excerpts from it:

“The westrels of the Madras slums who shouted obscenities at the gate of the Premier, wrought incalculable harm to the cause . . . . . The prominent among them (leaders) was E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, a former comrade of C. Rajagopalachari in Congress activities who, refusing in the old satyagraha style to pleas before the court, was sentenced to a year’s imprisonment for inciting people to join the campaign against compulsory Hindi. . . . . Following the same precedent women have replaced the obscene element.

“The Madras Premier must realise that he is up against the heart of the Tamil land. Many years before Tamil boys and girls enter the middle schools where Hindi is compulsorily taught, they would have imbibed with their mother’s milk a bitter hatred of Hindi and all that belongs to it, as the very devil which threw their mothers into prison. . . . . The Madras Premier is not lacking in imagination and the significance of the entry of women into the movement will not be lost on him.

“In any case compulsory Hindi is normally defunct and there is no need to carry on the agitation any longer. We would now earnestly advise the leaders of the movement, men and women to co-operate with the Premier in the strenuous efforts he is making to lay the ghost of non-co-operation and lead his people back to the way of constitutional progress . . . . . They should bring home to him at the next elections, unless he makes amends betime, the faith which he had created among women by prohibition has been considerably shaken by his compulsory Hindi scheme. The position of the Congress party in Tamil land is not what it was at the last election.

“This is so evident even to the casual observer that it would be strange if the Prime Minister is unaware of it”.<sup>89</sup>



These excerpts indicate the strong feelings against the measure stirred up by those in the Presidency who were antipathic to Rajaji; to them, the measure came as a convenient whip to attack Rajaji. On the whole, the criticisms levelled against this measure revealed the general feeling of jealousy and hostility against Rajaji in certain quarters.

### *Return of Bobbili—Its Impact:*

When the Raja of Bobbili returned to India from his foreign tour in September 1938, the anti-Hindi Movement received a further impetus with the Justicites joining the campaign in larger numbers. The Raja lost no time in proclaiming that the Congress Ministry had no popular support for its Hindi policy. He however condemned the picketing and other coercive methods adopted by the agitators.<sup>90</sup> His suggestion to hold a referendum on this burning issue by secret ballot in Madras invited sharp criticism from the Congress Ministers. Particularly the Local Administration Minister Gopala Reddy was so annoyed that he questioned the Raja's competence to advise the Government. Rajaji also denounced the "unheard-of-proposals" of the Raja which meant the "permanent establishment of the power of scurrilous libel and goondaism" instead of "orderly self-rule and civilisation".<sup>91</sup> These statements only served to aggravate the opposition to Hindi. The Raja advised the demonstrators to carry on their agitation until compulsory Hindi was abolished.

There was a general belief in the non-Congress circles that it was to curtail the great influence which the Raja of Bobbili commanded in the Justice Party that Rajaji used the Madras Estates Land Act and forced him to resign his leadership of the party. The Land Estate legislation was then under the consideration of a Joint Select Committee headed by T. Prakasam. The object of the bill was to abolish all intermediate tenures and to secure permanent possession of land to the tiller of the soil. The new Tenancy Legislation seeking amendment to the original Act would affect the vital interests of the Zamindars.

Governor Erskine also attributed the supineness of the Justice leaders to the Zamindari legislation of the Congress Ministry. Some "interesting intercepted correspondence" revealed to the Governor that the nominal leader the Raja of Bobbili and his chief lieutenant

the Raja of Venkatagiri had each without the knowledge of the other, tried to woo the Congress Government in self-interest. The Raja of Bobbili, who was very anxious to have his *peshkush* payment postponed, was negotiating with the Government through Mohamad Usman. The Raja of Venkatagiri was also equally afraid of being anti-Congress at that moment as that would make the approaching Zamindari legislation more stringent from the estate owners' point of view. "In plain language, therefore" wrote Erskine, "the Party's prospects are being marred because one leader is negotiating with its enemies in order to help his own private pocket, while the other is afraid to take an active part in politics owing to funk of what the Ministry might do to his Zamindari if he does. In fact, the sooner the Justice Party free themselves from the leadership of these spineless and lazy aristocrats, the better it will be for them".<sup>92</sup>

Some of the Zamindars openly met the Premier to gain some concessions in the proposed amendment. According to their averment, Rajaji promised to consider their case provided the Raja of Bobbili would relinquish his leadership of the Justice Party. The Zamindars, it would appear, prevailed upon the Raja to do so. The authenticity of this story has not been conclusively proved. The Raja was surprised at what he heard. Ultimately, however, he resigned in November 1938. But the subsequent friction between Rajaji and Prakasam gives some support to this version.

The Revenue Minister Prakasam had ordered the Revenue Secretariat — apparently without consulting the Premier — to commence work on the preparation of the Tenancy Legislation in accordance with the report of the Prakasam Committee.<sup>93</sup> This report was pronounced to be drastic by the Zamindars, as it intended to abolish the Zamindari system. Rajaji came to know of it only when the Revenue Secretary who wanted an additional establishment for this work which had to be ready by June 1939, forced the matter to his notice. Rajaji was angry with Prakasam. He wanted to keep the report from being placed before the Legislative Assembly until the Government decided as to what attitude it was to adopt. Rajaji told the Governor in confidence that he had no desire to expropriate the Zamindars. He would only reduce the rents where they were excessive and take a greater contribution from the Zamindars towards the State as he considered the *Peshkush* paid by some of them to be too inadequate and disproportionate to the revenue they were collecting. This attitude had resulted from his promise to the



Zamindars.\* But Prakasam had placed him in an embarrassing situation. Rajaji wanted the whole matter to be put off till the budget discussions were over but eventually capitulated, agreeing to give an additional Assistant Secretary to the Revenue Department.<sup>94</sup>

The resignation of the Raja of Bobbili from the leadership of the Justice Party tolled the “death-knell of the Party itself”. An admirer of the Raja of Bobbili says that after the latter’s exit, the party really became what Satyamurti described it “. . . . . a flimsy facade, rotten to the core and will crumble to pieces at the slightest touch of the human hand”.<sup>95</sup> Since none among the erstwhile Justice leaders was willing to head the party it was finally agreed that E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, the “man of the masses” would be its President.

In the meantime, the Government raided the *vidutalai* office on 5 October 1938 and confiscated the backnumbers of the paper and all its correspondence pertaining to the anti-Hindi movement.<sup>96</sup> Ramaswami Naicker’s brother Krishnaswami Naicker who was publisher and printer of the papers *Vidutalai* and *Kudiarasu* and keeper of the *Unmai Vilakkam* Press was convicted and sentenced to six months imprisonment. At the time of deliverance of judgment, a large crowd which had gathered outside the court indulged in stone-throwing at the offices of the pro-Government newspapers and Brahman Coffee hotels.<sup>97</sup>

Soon after the raid, Ramaswami Naicker sought an interview with the Governor. But it was refused because the Governor felt his “antecedents were bad”. He had known him as a “demagogic Tamil speaker” used by the Justice party for their own ends. Since Erskine was disenchanted with his anti-Hindi and anti-Brahman activities he did not think an interview with him was desirable.<sup>98</sup>

Towards the end of November 1938, Ramaswami Naicker was arrested for the two speeches he had made on 13 and 14 of that month. The first one was made at the Tamil Nad Women’s Con-

\* Later Rajaji also took a totally different attitude which surprised even the Governor. It was felt that his sudden switch over to extreme ideas like the right of the State to break contracts and ignore vested interests could have been occasioned by party pressure.

On 15 July 1939 the Rajas of Venkatagiri, Bobbili and Parlakimedi waited on Vallabhbhai Patel seeking “justice”. Since the general principles of the Prakasam Report had been accepted by the Madras Legislative Assembly Patel pleaded his inability to do anything without the co-operation of the Madras Government and particularly the Revenue Minister who had devoted so much time and thought to the question. (Patel to Rajaji, 16 and 19 July 1939, *Rajaji Papers*).

ference\* and the second at the Peddunaickenpet Tamilar Kazhagam, both in Madras. Women then entered the fray and picketed the Hindu Theological High School. Seventy three of them were jailed under the Criminal Law Amendment Act.<sup>99</sup>

In December 1938, Ramaswami Naicker was offered the Presidency of the Justice Party which was accepted *in absentia*, as he was in jail. But his Presidential address which was read at the fourteenth conference of the Justice Party on 29 December, was the usual tirade against Brahmans.<sup>100</sup> Among the many resolutions adopted at this confederation two merit mention: one recommended the substitution of *Tiruvallar* for *Sri* and the other, the removal of Gandhiji's portraits from the premises of the local boards. The Sanskrit *Sri* was used before surnames instead of the English Mister. To the Justice Party it was blasphemous to place portraits of Gandhiji alongside of those of their Majesties.\*\*<sup>101</sup>

On 5 December when he was tried, Naicker refused to cross examine the witnesses. In his statement made in the court the next day, he emphasised three factors by way of disproving the Government's contentions: (1) his opposition to Hindi started as early as 1930, following the Self-Respect conference at Nannilam, and not after the publication of the Government order on 21 April 1938 as the Government contended; (2) the motive behind the picketings in front of the Premier's residence and the Hindu Theological High School was not coercion but a desire to show that the agitation had the backing of the public; and (3) none of his speeches including the ones referred to in the charge sheet had incited anyone to break the law of the State. He was therefore not guilty of the charges cited.

The Magistrate refuted the statement and sentenced Naicker to one year rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 1000 in respect of each of the two offences on which he was convicted. In default of payment of the penalty, he would undergo rigorous imprisonment for a further period of six months in each case and the sentences would run concurrently.<sup>102</sup>

. The incarceration of Ramaswami Naicker did not mitigate the situation. On the contrary, rioting intensified and convictions also increased from about 350 odd men and women to a 1000. In Feb-

\* It was at this conference that Naicker was conferred the title of *Periyar* ("the great man").

\*\* Tamil Nadu had to wait for three decades before *Sri* and *Srimati* were replaced respectively by *Tiruvallar* and *Tirumati* and Gandhiji's portraits yielded place to those of Tiruvalluvar in 1967, by the DMK Government.



ruary 1939, the agitation took a new turn when there were demonstrations against the flying of the Congress flag over the Ripon buildings which housed the office of the Madras Corporation. Crowds assembled in front of the buildings and shouted anti-Congress slogans.<sup>103</sup> Congress was thus bedevilled with greater problems. Naicker's image was given a big boost. At all non-Congress meetings, Periyar's portrait was unveiled and he was paid rich tributes. He was deemed the saviour of the Tamils from the clutches of Aryanisation.

On considerations of health, Naicker was released in April 1939. The anti-Hindi agitation continued. It did not subside even after the resignation of the Congress Ministry in October 1939. Members of the Justice Party, who were not satisfied with the release of the anti-Hindi prisoners, threatened more vigorous action unless compulsory Hindi was dropped.<sup>104</sup> The Government was attacked by the *Madras Mail*, the European Association, the Justice Party and the Muslim League for meekly continuing the most unpopular and least defensible policies of the Congress Government. The embarrassed Governor informed the Viceroy that the introduction of compulsory Hindi ran contrary to the wishes of the bulk of the population. He wrote that a majority of his late cabinet would have been prepared to make the subject optional but for the "insistence of the late Premier" who "I have reason to believe . . . . now realises his mistake".<sup>105</sup> When the anti-Hindi agitation was at its height, Rajaji appeared to have expressed the opinion to Erskine that he had made a great mistake in forcing compulsory Hindi on the Presidency.\*<sup>106</sup> But making it optional, he felt, would not serve the interests of the Congress as it was a part of the programme on the basis of which his Government was elected. He must therefore fulfil it.

The Viceroy who cautioned the Governor against any change at that stage said if picketing were to be resumed, he could conveniently call off the compulsory element and point to the circumstances that forced his hand.<sup>107</sup> But Erskine did not agree to this proposal. He wanted only a modification and not a reversal of Rajaji's policy. A reversal, he felt, would be fatal. He wanted to go extremely slow in reversing Congress principles. But Erskine was really in two minds as he also wanted to show "some consideration for loyalists

\*As Union Home Minister (1950–'51) Rajaji warned the Hindi lovers against imposing Hindi on the south which would disintegrate rather than unite India.

(the Justicite elements) and not bow too much to the Congress who are fundamentally hostile to us".<sup>108</sup>

After giving some thought to the problem, the Governor proposed to deal with Hindi on the same line as prohibition. He decided to leave it alone in those schools where it was being taught and not to extend it to other schools,<sup>109</sup> although this would mean a virtual abandoning of the Congress scheme. Rajaji objected to this as he regarded this reform as a declaration of war. An angry Governor retorted that it was well-known that the "late Premier is a very cunning Madrasi Brahman" who "alters his views periodically to suit his party's advantage". The Governor further affirmed that he would not govern the Presidency by the kind permission of the local Congress leader. He said, "I must again state that compulsory Hindi was a policy that was forced on the population against their will and which they detest".<sup>110</sup>

When it became certain that the Congress had no intention of returning to office, the Governor decided to modify the "more unpopular policies" of the late Ministry, so as to encourage the loyalist Hindu elements as well as the Muslims.<sup>111</sup> His proposal to make the learning of Hindi optional<sup>112</sup> was approved by the Viceroy and the Secretary of State.<sup>113</sup> The Viceroy, however, advised him to hold his hand as there appeared to be a prospect of a settlement with Gandhiji. When the conversations with Gandhiji broke down, the Governor proceeded to substitute optional for compulsory Hindi. A Press *communique* was issued on 21 February 1940 substituting optional for compulsory Hindi in the schools under their control in which the compulsory system had been introduced. Apart from retention of Hindi as an optional subject, it was extended to forms IV to VI of secondary schools as an optional subject. The *communique* stressed that a knowledge of Hindi would be of great assistance to the inhabitants of the Madras Presidency in facilitating intercourse with those areas in India where Hindi was spoken.

This *communique* having raised some doubts in the mind of the public, the Government issued another one by way of clarification.<sup>114</sup> Hindi was already an optional subject for (C) group of the SSLC examination and could be offered as a subject in (A) group by the comparatively few students, whose mother tongue had no script, for example, Konkani.

In the year 1939–40, twenty five High Schools were offering Hindi in (C) group for SSLC examination and six under (A) group.



*Labour: A disquieting trend:*

It is true that much of the problem that Rajaji was confronted with had been the result of his own innovative measures. But problems came from other sources also. The gravest problem that caused him considerable depression throughout his tenure of two years and three months was that of the labour. Though he was not responsible for the labour troubles, his methods of tackling them were denounced by his friends and foes alike.

V.V. Giri, who was made Minister for labour and Industries having regard to his previous career as labour leader, did everything possible to forge a good relationship between the employers and the employed. His utterances emphasised the methods of conciliation and arbitration. Even while drafting a somewhat revolutionary Bill he had the good sense to place the broad outline of his proposals before a joint meeting of the representatives of employers and employees for comments and modifications. Evidently Giri wanted to encourage frequent and cordial exchanges between the workers and their employers. With such a man as the Labour Minister, Congressmen and industrial workers hopefully looked forward to a new era of labour relations when police brutalities and intervention in industrial disputes would become things of the past. This optimism coupled with the improved economic conditions gave birth to a new type of labour militancy which found expression in wage demands and strikes. To nip this trend in the bud and to bring about some harmony between the labour and the capital, the Government issued a *communique* in October 1937 to the effect that the Ministry would “strongly disapprove” of any strike unless all other methods of representation had failed.<sup>115</sup>

The *communique* hardly satisfied the labourers. The gulf between them and their employers remained as wide as ever, the establishment of courts of enquiry and initiation of conciliatory procedures notwithstanding. Labour and capital refused to be reconciled. In many cases, the employers succeeded in creating the impression that while they were just and reasonable, the labourers were not and so they had to be firm in handling them. Rajaji's attitude towards labour complicated the situation. And Giri stood in awe of the Premier. Rajaji identified labour militancy with Socialism and Communism both of which he deemed should be put down with an iron hand. Convinced that strikers were an irresponsible and dangerous element, Rajaji identified himself with the employers when labour

unrest began particularly in the textile mills of Madura, Coimbatore and Madras city. He wanted the labourers to forget their unions if they expected the Government to consider their requests. Rajaji did not take into account the fact that mill-owners were also unhelpful in reaching an agreement. There were Mill owners who had even employed ruffians to keep the labourers under control.<sup>116</sup> In short, there was no attempt made to discuss this problem in an atmosphere free from tension and excitement. The sequel was the police and the magistracy dealt with the labour in exactly the same manner as they did during the days of diarchy.

The first clash between strikers and police occurred in February 1938 when the workers of the Saroja Mill in Coimbatore began a lightning strike over the dismissal of 15 of the employees. The second one occurred a few days later in the Indian Leaf Tobacco Distributing Company's Factory at Chirala in Guntur district. It was a more serious and protracted dispute which assumed serious proportions on 14 February when nearly 6000 workers gathered outside the factory, some wanting to go back to work and others preventing them. Failing to subdue the crowd which indulged in heavy stone-throwing even after a lathi charge, the police opened fire. The warning given by the police was treated lightly by the crowd under the thought that a popular Government would not resort to shooting. One person was killed in the shooting incident and another was fatally wounded. The crowd dispersed thereafter. Justice Horwill who conducted an enquiry into the incident fully exonerated the police. The Government accepted the report vindicating the police though reluctantly.<sup>117</sup>

The police firing at Chittivalsa jute Mills in Vizagapatam in February 1939 resulted in another death. It was a stay-in-strike demanding the reinstatement of one Appanna, a weaver, who was dismissed on 13 February 1939 for shortage of production. When the Police ordered the workers to clear the mills, the latter resorted to stone-throwing. Fearing damage to the property of the mill the constables loaded the guns. Collector Crombie seemed to have ordered "Don't fire" which was misheard and fire was opened. Rajaji wanted the incompetent Crombie to be transferred but it was averted by the interference of Erskine.<sup>118</sup>

The strike in the Parry and Company Sugar factories at Nellikuppam and Ranipet in May 1939 received no support from any Minister because every one was aware that Messrs. Parry were among the best employers in India.<sup>119</sup> It was felt that Communist influence was behind them. The Choolai mills were closed because



the management was unable to comply with the workers' demands. The Madras Corporation voted a grant of Rs. 5000 as a gift to the labourers who were thrown out of work and their families. But the Government vetoed it. This pleased the Governor so much that he remarked that the Ministers were beginning to realise that a firmer stand had to be taken in regard to the extreme demand of the labourers and their unions in the Presidency.<sup>120</sup>

It may be mentioned in the passing that the Travancore National and Quilon Bank muddle also took place during this period. It concerned the Presidency as many of the Bank's depositors were British Indians. The report of the enquiry committee was pronounced to be a "damning document".<sup>121</sup>

### *Demand for Separate Andhra :*

The Rajaji Ministry had a sufficiently arduous task to perform during a very short span of two years and a quarter. Apart from strikes in Mill and agitations everywhere against some of his policies, he had also to contend with the demand of the Andhra Congressmen for a separate Andhra State.\*

\* The first signs of the Andhra Movement demanding a separate Andhra province appeared as early as 1909. Its leaders were T. Prakasam, M. Krishna Rao, B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Konda Venkatapayya and the Tamilian N.K. Ramaswamy Iyer. The Movement actually grew out of the Telugu vernacular revival which had started in the 1870s. The "Mylapore Set" (*Supra*: Chapter II) was against this move which it feared would break its connections with the Circar Towns in the Andhra region. The Subba Rao — Ramachandra Rao group was the "Andhra Agent" of the Mylaporeans; they also opposed the Andhra Movement. Though this group was involved in the vernacular revivalism it was opposed to snapping its existing lucrative political contacts. (D.A. Washbrook, *The emergence of Provincial Politics*, pp. 250 & 51). The Movement, however, was fitful. In 1917 the Calcutta Congress presided over by Besant passed a resolution recognising Andhra as a separate Congress circle. The Home Rule agitation was organised in Andhra which was permitted to have its own Congress Committees. This gave the Andhras an independent base in the Presidency. But all the Committees campaigned unitedly towards the attainment of *Swaraj* for India. The issue was raised in the Madras Legislative Council in 1927 by P. Anjaneyulu who recommended the constitution of the contiguous Telugu speaking areas in the Presidency into a "separate Andhra Province for all legislative, administrative and judicial purposes". It was pointed out that the Congress had successfully divided the Presidency into linguistic areas creating a separate Provincial Congress Committee for each of the linguistic areas. (*MLCP*, Vol. XXXV (1927) p. 62). Though the motion was carried, the justice Ministry did not implement it. The same year (1927) the Andhra University was created. When the Congress formed the Ministry in 1937, the Andhras naturally hoped for a materialisation of the cause for which they had long been fighting.

Gandhiji highly commended the Andhras' move for a separate State. He declared that he stood for a revision of Provinces on a linguistic basis. Acknowledging his debt to the Andhra Movement from which he took the cue, Gandhiji stated that the status of a Province must be conferred on Andhra.<sup>122</sup> He also urged Rajaji to work in this direction. But Rajaji did not favour the separation of Andhra from the Madras Presidency. He had a strong tendency to shelve the issue until Independence. The Telugus were greatly disillusioned by Rajaji's delaying tactics. Since Rajaji's relations with them were not very cordial, they feared a Rajaji-Erskine conspiracy which might influence the Secretary of State against acceding to their demand.<sup>123</sup>

The Madras Presidency was too vast and multilingual. There were a hundred members from the Andhra region in the Madras Legislature who knew neither Tamil nor Malayalam nor Canarese. There was an equal number of Tamil members who knew no other Indian language than Tamil. There were ten each from Malabar and Canara knowing respectively only Malayalam and Canarese among the four languages of the Presidency. Then, there were members numbering over a hundred or half of the Assembly, not knowing English. It was therefore felt that the best solution would be to separate the Andhra area from the rest of the Presidency and then to carve out a "Canarese Province" and a "Malayalee enclave", the former compounded of areas in Madras and Bombay. On 19 June 1938, Konda Venkatapayya brought a resolution in the Assembly recommending the separation of the Andhra area from the rest of the Presidency and the creation of a "Canarese Province" and a "Malayalee enclave." But the Andhra members themselves were not unanimous in supporting the motion where the separation of the Andhra from the Presidency was concerned. Members from the Ceded districts were against merging their areas in the proposed State. But the motion was adopted. Rajaji who supported the motion promised to have it forwarded to the Government of India. This did not satisfy the protagonists of separation although there was no major internal crisis over this issue.

In July 1938, deputationists from Telugu, Canarese and Malayalam areas met the Congress Working Committee and placed before it their views on the redistribution of the Provinces on linguistic basis for administrative convenience. The Committee accepted their views. It passed a resolution assuring the people of the areas concerned that the solution of the issue would form a part



of the future scheme of Government of India “as soon as the Congress has the power to do so”. The resolution also appealed to the people to desist from any further agitation to press their demand as that would divert attention from the main issue before the country.\*<sup>124</sup>

*Anxious Days with Communalists and Communists:*

The Muslim League which was decidedly anti-Congress, was bent upon giving a religious tinge to every act of the Congress including the singing of *Vande Mataram*. In accordance with the desire of B. Sambamurti, the singing of *Vande Mataram* before the commencement of the sittings in the Legislature was experimented. But it was objected to by the Muslim League despite the fact that *Vande Mataram* was no religious prayer. In January 1938, the Muslim Members walked out of the Legislature on account of the singing of *Vande Mataram*. At the request of the Premier, the Speaker had to discontinue the practice from 1 March 1938.<sup>125</sup> The other actions sponsored by the Congress which infuriated the Muslim opinion in the Presidency were the compulsory teaching of Hindi; the flying of the Congress flag over the buildings of most of the local bodies; and the placing of Gandhiji's portrait or bust in certain educational establishments belonging to local authorities.

Some of the taxes of the Congress Ministry too, especially the one on tobacco irritated the Muslims. Since they were great traders, the taxes affected the Muslims to a proportionately greater extent than they did the Hindus. Analysing the causes for the discontent among the Muslims of the Presidency, Erskine wrote after the resignation of the Rajaji Ministry that the Muslims had come to the firm conclusion that the “Congress is a purely Hindu body engaged in a nefarious conspiracy to damage Muslim interests both secular and religious”. Although Erskine did not subscribe to this view, he felt that the actions of the Congress had the effect of “stirring up this sleeping Frankenstein”, in the Presidency.<sup>126</sup>

The Ministry had no Indian Christian on it initially, though later C.J. Varkey was inducted. This omission caused considerable disquiet among this section of the population. Not one Indian Christian was given a place in any of the seven Congress Ministries. In an anonymous letter published in the *Madras Mail*, a member of

\* Andhra became a separate State only in 1953.

the Indian Christian community complained that communal constitution (even regional and linguistic) of the Ministries was writ large upon their face. Pointing to the fact that in several provinces the Congress went out of its way to look for Muslim Ministers, the anonymous letter notified that “there is a general feeling that Christian interests suffer because Christians do not make themselves a nuisance like certain other communities”. Taking the Premier to task for his statement in the Assembly that he was not aware of any grievance or discontent among Christians, the letter said: “The Premier’s statement is almost an invitation to the Christians to start an unseemly agitation”.<sup>127</sup>

Commenting on this, Rajaji said “Even God Himself cannot escape attacks from interested and disappointed persons if an appeal for complaints should be made in this style. What then about a Prime Minister who has to be firm against communal claims of all sorts day in and day out, over and above what number he has to admit perforce”.<sup>128</sup>

Rajaji had an innate aversion to Communists and Socialists. He was firm in his view that they were responsible for the spate of strikes in the Presidency. The party which was nascent in the Presidency in the twenties, received an impetus by the visit to Madras of the prominent labour leader Saklatwala in 1927. It denounced the Congress as the “stronghold of landlordism, capitalism and private ownership”. The Communists often declared that though they were not wedded to a policy of non-violence, violence had no place in their creed. But it accommodated quite a few of the erstwhile revolutionaries. “Arya” who attempted to blow up the godown of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in George Town during the Civil Disobedience Movement, joined the Communist party branch at Madras under the assumed name of “Sundaram”. Eventually he became the Secretary of the party for the George Town area. Another man in the Madras Party, Amir Hyder Khan alias “Sankar” who had undergone “party course” in Russia, was involved in the well-known Meerut Conspiracy case.

In 1932 Bhashyam, Hyder Khan and V.K. Narasimhan were arrested. They went on hunger strike for the ill treatment meted out to them in the jail. Bhashyam says that he was “made to witness (at the Bellary Main jail) with cross fetters on, the flogging of Mahabir Singh of the Lahore Conspiracy case . . . . .”<sup>129</sup> Another person Narayan who was a victim of brutalities during the civil disobedience stated that after such treatment he began to have serious doubts



about the efficiency of non-violence as a weapon in the fight against foreign rule. He was also drawn to the Russian model.<sup>130</sup>

In July 1934 the Communist party was banned by the Government of India on the ground that it constituted a menace to public peace. It may be mentioned in the passing, that the self-respecters led by E.V. Ramaswami Naicker advocated among other things, the adoption of the Russian system of government and demanded the release of the prisoners of the Meerut conspiracy case.\* Naicker's movement had imbibed some of the communist ideas: both were anti-Congress; both demanded radical social, economic and political reforms. Naicker's leanings towards Communism were the result of his visit to the U.S.S.R. in 1932. The founders of the Self-Respect Movement won the favour of both the Justicites and Communists — of the former, by their hatred for Brahmans; of the latter, by their love of the Soviet system. However, the ban on the Communist party and other left wing organisations by the Government of India cooled Naicker's enthusiasm for Communism. Shrewd Naicker lost no time to declare that his party had nothing to do with the Communist party and that violence was not its creed. His party was not banned.

The banning of the Communist party did not minimise the activities of the Communists. They formed the Labour Protection League through which communist ideas were steadily propagated among the masses in the Presidency. It began its widespread agitation after the Congress party took office. The Communists openly advocated the achievement of complete independence of India by the violent overthrow of the British rule, the cancellation of all national debts, the abolition of the Indian States and the confiscation without compensation of all the lands, forests and other properties of the ruling princes, zamindars and landlords. The party sought to achieve all these by four methods: (1) resorting to a general strike of workers; (2) developing a peasant movement for non-payment of rents and taxes into an all-India agrarian revolution; (3) organising a nation-wide movement for political independence which would attract all the workers, peasants and petty bourgeois; and (4) spreading revolutionary propaganda in the army and the police, inciting them to revolt against the British rule.<sup>131</sup>

When the Congress wanted to lift the ban on Communists after

\* It was a conspiracy of labour leaders in Meerut to overthrow the British Government.

it accepted office, Rajaji was against it. He disclosed his plan to issue a Manifesto refusing to lift the ban. But after the Premiers' Confer- at Bombay, he dropped the idea. In October 1937, he arrested S.S. Batliwala, a Bombay Socialist, for his speech in Nellore which was construed to be seditious. This earned the Rajaji Ministry the hostility of Congressmen themselves both inside and outside the Presidency. The question of his arrest was raised at the meeting of the AICC held at Calcutta which Rajaji could not attend owing to illness. Despite protest demonstrations and criticisms against the arrest, Rajaji refused to budge and said in a speech that he took full responsibility for this action. The Sessions Judge, Nellore, who tried Batliwala sentenced him to six months' imprisonment for sedition although the jury unanimously held him not guilty. "It is a perverse, foolish and violent speech but there is nothing in it to support the view . . . . . that its object was to rouse a 'spirit of revolt' against the established Government. To our mind therefore the conviction of Mr. Batliwala for sedition is unsustainable", commented *The Hindu*.<sup>132</sup>

In November 1938, some Communists met Gandhiji to discuss the Congress Ministries' inroads into civil liberty. Referring to the cry about abuse of civil liberty\* in Congress circles they expressed their view that it was raised merely as a convenient pretext to shield the Ministers, some of whom were behaving exactly like the old bureaucrats meaning obviously Rajaji thereby. Gandhiji immediately said that he "would not screen a single Minister who interferes with civil liberty or acts contrary to Congress resolutions. If you have Rajaji in mind, I am prepared to give you full satisfaction or ask him to resign".<sup>133</sup>

### *Rajaji Ministry Resigns:*

The Second World War broke out on 1 September 1939. India was declared belligerent on 3 September without the consent of the people and without consulting the Legislative bodies. The Congress Working Committee met on 14 September at Wardha to consider the situation. While expressing its profound sympathies with the fate of Poland which had fallen a victim to brute force, the Com-

\*There was a resolution on civil liberty which was passed by the AICC at Delhi in September 1938 which occasioned the walk out of a group of people. The resolution was drafted by Gandhiji himself.



mittee stated that India had been in a similar plight for over a century and a half. She was being denied that very democracy for which England affected to be fighting for. Again while the Dominions were deciding their own participation in the war, India had been taken for granted by England. England had thus forced on India the war with which the latter was not concerned directly or indirectly. The Working Committee passed a resolution to the effect that unless it knew in clear terms the purpose for which the war was being fought by Britain, it could not advise its country to extend its fullest measure of co-operation to the Government.<sup>134</sup>

Within four days after this meeting, the Working Committee of the Muslim League passed a resolution to the effect that the Muslim co-operation in the war could not be had unless the Government secured them justice and fair play in the Congress governed Provinces. They wanted the Governors to exercise their special powers which they had never used thanks to the threat of the Congress High Command.

In the meantime, with the approval of the Congress Working Committee, the Parliamentary Sub Committee issued the following instruction for the guidance of the Congress Ministries in the Congress Provinces:

“The resolution of the Working Committee calls upon the Congress Provincial Government to tender their resignations. These resignations should be given after the Assembly meetings which have been convened for the purpose of discussing such urgent business as may be pending but it is expected that resignations will be tendered by October 31, 1939”.<sup>135</sup>

At a special meeting of the Legislative Assembly held on 26 October 1939, Rajaji moved a resolution which regretted two facts: India had been made to participate in the War without her consent; and the situation had not been rightly understood by His Majesty's Government when authorising the issue of the statement on India. The resolution also approved of the decision of the Ministry to tender its resignation.<sup>136</sup>

On 27 October, the Premier tendered the resignation of his Ministry but it was not accepted until 30 October as the Governor wanted time to make alternative arrangements. Since no other party was in a position to form a Ministry which could command a majority in the Legislature, the Governor formally accepted the resignation on 30 October. Immediately thereafter he issued a Proclamation under Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935,

which declared that all his functions would be exercised in his discretion and that he would assume the powers of the Legislature. The Governor appointed three members of the Civil Service to be his Advisers and delegated to them authority to pass final orders in certain classes of cases.<sup>137</sup>

The Congress felt relieved that there was no Interim Ministry because the work they had done so far would be safe.<sup>138</sup> The Opposition was glad that the Congress was out of power.<sup>139</sup> Now that the Congress Ministry had resigned, the Muslim League vied with the Justice party in reiterating its support and assistance to the British Government. The promised Muslim co-operation caused only anxiety to the British when they thought of the "onerous conditions" Jinnah would demand as the price of any degree of co-operation or support.<sup>140</sup> Jinnah appealed to the Muslims all over India to observe 22 December 1939 as a day of deliverance from the Congress regime. The Madras branch of the Muslim League had endorsed the appeal of Jinnah. E.V. Ramaswami Naicker exhorted his followers to join the Muslims in the observance of the day.<sup>141</sup> The day was observed in Madras with leaders of these parties taking out an anti-Congress procession. Meetings were addressed mainly by anti-Congress Hindus and Christians. The tone of the speeches was anti-Congress and anti-Gandhiji. One section of the Muslims threatened satyagraha if the portraits of Gandhiji were not removed from the Municipal Elementary Schools.

How such agitational activities, which could only disrupt public peace and order on the domestic front, could help in the prosecution of the war was beyond one's comprehension.

Following the resignation of its Ministries, the Congress passed a resolution banning the attendance of its members at the Simla session of the Central Assembly. Many members were vexed at this. Because in their absence, the Assembly whose life had been extended by another year, could easily enact many measures detrimental to the interests of India. Satyamurti stoutly opposed the stand of the top Congress leadership. In his letter to Gandhiji he exploded that the ban on attendance was "wrong and futile". He reminded Gandhiji of an earlier decision of the Congress at Benares that the legislative front must be utilised to the utmost in the fight for *Purna Swaraj*.<sup>142</sup> On account of his persistent persuasion, the Congress allowed its members to attend the Budget Session of the Assembly in early 1940. Satyamurti took the opportunity to mount a comprehensive attack on the Government for dragging India into the



war. But after the Budget Session, the ban was back into effect. Many legislators were unhappy over this decision of the Congress.

### *An Assessment :*

Indisputably, Rajaji's was the best Indian administration the Presidency had had prior to independence. In respect of maintaining law and order, Rajaji was second to none, including the British. The Governor himself had paid him high tributes touching this. Rajaji was not merely the Premier and Finance Minister. He held the police portfolio also. He could not brook any proposal for the separation of the executive and judicial functions of District Officers. He affirmed that the Government could not hand over its administration to the High Court; it must have control over the District Magistrate and through him over the police.<sup>143</sup> Erskine once said that Rajaji was "a sort of dictator and in fact runs the whole show".<sup>144</sup>

None could equal or excel Rajaji in utilising the existing laws to carry out his policies. An instance or two may be cited. He used Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code to prevent a mill from re-opening while the labour dispute was going on. He ordered the use of section 7 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act against the anti-Hindi agitators. When some Brahman smugglers appealed to him for reduction of their sentences of imprisonment, Rajaji did sanction the use of Section 401 of the Criminal Procedure Code to remit their sentences of imprisonment. But before doing so, he extracted from them for the Treasury, more than they could have been fined. He extorted from the Hindus and Muslims of Ambur Rs. 2000 each as a condition precedent to withdrawal of pending cases which arose in the first instance from riots and arson.<sup>145</sup>

Rajaji's soft attitude towards the police was criticised by many Congress MLAs. He was not unaware of it. Prior to assuming office, Rajaji warned the police and other Government servants that they would have to work closely with the local Congress Committees and extend full co-operation to the Congress. But after forming the Ministry and assuming the Police portfolio his attitude changed. He reposed full confidence and trust in the bureaucrats including European officers. He urged the MLAs and the public to shed their past "prejudices" against the police. He found that the police was prepared to serve the Congress Ministers who were their new masters as loyally as they did the British. He did not abolish the

Presidency General Reserve which was founded in order to quash the Civil Disobedience Movement. Many Congressmen accused Rajaji of speaking in the “language of ‘Law and Order’ of the Old Regime”.<sup>146</sup>

It would be unfair to conclude that Rajaji had condoned all police officers or had forgotten the evil deeds of all. He might not have allowed a public criticism of the Police department. But undeniably, the department bore the stamp of his personality and ideas. Rajaji did summon Cunningham whose atrocities during the Civil Disobedience Movement he had not forgotten to tell him what kind of Police department he wanted. There was a strong rumour that Rajaji forced Cunningham’s resignation. This may or may not be true. But Rajaji refused to endorse his scheme for the rapid expansion of the Special Branch in September 1937. The scheme had already been approved by the Interim Ministry and was being resubmitted to him. When Cunningham’s successor Frederick Sayers resubmitted the proposal in September 1938, Rajaji approved it pointing out that the work in the department had increased since the Congress assumed office.<sup>147</sup> The Criminal Tribes Act was repealed in June 1938. This was part of an all-India move to fulfil its election pledge to do away with a measure which was a “negation of civil liberty” as Jawaharlal Nehru described it.

It was seen that Rajaji instructed the Police to enforce prohibition strictly. Under his instructions, the police would use the drinker as approver to catch the distiller—the source of liquor supply. It was brought to his notice that bootlegging was going on in a border area and that when the arm of enforcement stretched to catch the culprits, they would step into the neighbouring Princely State of Mysore. Rajaji instructed the officials to take appropriate steps. Once such a bootlegger who tried to escape was shot by a Police Officer. The culprit was fatally injured and what was worse, at the time of shooting, the bootlegger was inside the border of Mysore. However, when the Mysore State Police sued the Madras Police officer for attempted murder, Rajaji went to the latter’s rescue declaring that he enjoyed the backing of the Premier of the Madras Presidency. He also arranged for the engagement of the best legal brain to be the advocate of the defendant on behalf of the Government of Madras. And the police officer concerned had to be let off legally. This instance brings to the fore, the three rare features that distinguished the administration of the Presidency under Rajaji’s Premiership:<sup>148</sup>



1. Whenever an honest officer or a group of officers got into legal or other tangle in executing the State's policies, Rajaji fully backed them and made known to all concerned that he was solidly behind such officers.

2. Instead of booking and prosecuting drinkers and dealers of liquor, it was his instructions to use them to locate the source of supply of liquor and destroy such source.

3. When confronted with legal hurdles, he made his officers meet them legally with the best of legal advice available then, and not administratively or politically.

Rajaji's relations with Erskine and other principal British officers were more cordial and harmonious than the British themselves had expected from a staunch no-changer. Erskine once said nostalgically that he could never forget the most pleasant relations that had always existed between them.<sup>149</sup>

In a lighter vein he wrote once, "The Madras administration has been characterised as that of the Maharaja (myself) and his Dewan (Rajagopalachari) while, on the other hand, Rajagopalachari has publicly styled him (Rajaji) the snake charmer of the snake of British Imperialism. . . ." <sup>150</sup>

Governor Erskine's letters to Viceroy Linlithgow are replete with paeons of praise for Rajaji, his administrative acumen and friendly attitude to the British authorities. Erskine also adhered to the gentleman's agreement not to exercise veto in the implementation of the Provincial autonomy. All this did not mean that there was no difference of opinion at all between them. The healthy policy of give and take kept their cordiality in tact.

Erskine did not approve of Rajaji's proposal to appoint K.S. Krishnaswamy Iyer to officiate as judge of the Madras High Court when Justice Wardworth proceeded on leave. The British Governor strongly felt that the vacancy should not go to an Indian member of the Civil Service, especially when a fully qualified man was available in Horwill.<sup>151</sup>

There were occasions when both the Governor and the Premier had to submit unwillingly to the decision of the Supreme Government. The appointment of Madhava Rao was an instance. The Government of India made him the Agent to Burma. Both Rajaji and Erskine were furious at this appointment which was made without consulting them.<sup>152</sup> They did not approve of Madhava Rao's appointment. Rajaji recommended Satyamurti. Erskine also supported him. He wrote that Satyamurti was "able, can assert

himself and is pugnacious . . . . . If Satyamurti fails, as I feel anybody must fail, it is just as well that the Congress Party should get involved in that failure".<sup>153</sup> The controversy over this appointment raged for several months. And finally, Hutchings, an Englishman was appointed.

Rajaji maintained smooth relations with all his cabinet colleagues except Prakasam who was a veritable thorn on his flesh. Most of the Ministers were entirely dependent on the Premier. Though Subbaroyan's affinity to the Congress could not be termed genuine he was certainly loyal to Rajaji. Pleasant socially, Subbaroyan had no real sympathy with the Congress attitude on relations with the Government House and the stay on the Nilgiri Hills in hot weather. It was reported that his occasional liberal potations were taken advantage of by his "friends" to "worm out the Ministry's secrets from him."<sup>154</sup> Yakub Hasan who was true to Rajaji also did not agree with the Congress stand on the aforesaid matters. Hasan was taken to task by Rajaji when the latter noted in the Press that Yakub had lunched with the Governor. Rajaji wrote: ". . . this is a matter for explanation . . . you are aware of the restrictions on the subject. I should like to know the circumstances so that if any question arises I can explain".<sup>155</sup> Even the Premier was subjected to the restrictions imposed by the High Command where social relations with the British authorities were concerned. Rajaji was reprimanded by Patel for having given a dinner party to his Secretary when he retired, ignoring the Working Committee's resolution. Patel wrote: "It is bad precedent and will undoubtedly lead to complications. There are other ways open to you to show your regard to him, if he deserved your confidence, but you cannot afford to set an example of breaking rules of our organisation in this manner. . . . . How can you attend this dinner party? Yakub Hasan should have been pulled up and prevented from attending the Governor's party. You must not give cause for complaints of this nature."<sup>156</sup>

It was unfortunate that the Rajaji Ministry had to quit within three years of assumption of Office. The Congress was not to blame for it did no more than follow its own declared policy in asking its Ministries to resign. It was rather the misfortune of the Presidency that it was not destined to enjoy the benefits of the administration of a man who could be counted among the greatest statesmen of his country and time, for more than two years and a quarter. The Ministry's achievements during this very short tenure were immense despite all efforts of its enemies to thwart them. More than six solid



years had elapsed before the next Congress Ministry was installed in the Presidency. During this critical interregnum, the Congress had had many a confrontation with the Government and had to resort to civil disobedience twice more, starting with the Individual Satyagraha in 1940.

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86. *Ibid.*, Gandhiji to Rajaji, 24 Dec. 1938, Vol. XLVIII, p. 239.
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119. *Ibid.*, 8 May 1939.
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143. Erskine to Linlithgow, 23 May 1938, *Linlithgow Papers*.
144. Erskine to Viceroy, 5 Aug. 1937, *Erskine Papers*.
145. *Ibid.*, Erskine to Linlithgow, 28 May 1938.
146. David Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 218.
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150. Erskine to Linlithgow, 23 May 1938, *Linlithgow Papers*.
151. Private Secretary to Erskine to Rajaji, 2 Nov. 1937, *Erskine Papers*.
152. *Ibid.*, Erskine's telegram to Montagu, 1939, *Erskine Papers*.
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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

# Anti-War Individual Satyagraha

The year 1940 was a bleak one for the whole of India with Jinnah emerging as the greatest stumbling block to its unity. He had brought in his pernicious two-nation theory faithfully repeating the British hypothesis that India was not a nation, nor a country but a mere geographical expression; it was a sub-continent composed of nationalities—the Hindus and the Muslims being the two major ones. Of course, there was an apparent conciliatory gesture on the part of Viceroy Linlithgow who declared on 10 January 1940 his Government's objective to confer on India full Dominion Status of the Westminster variety.<sup>1</sup> Westminster pattern was akin to independence and included the right to secede. But the subsequent statement made on 11 February by Zetland, Secretary of State, to the Press left no doubt about Britain's real intention to see India subjected, humiliated and divided. He made it clear that Britain, not India, would determine the latter's status. Without recognising India's independence, Zetland put the burden of solving the minorities' question on India. Zetland's act obliterated the conciliatory effect of the Viceroy's declaration.<sup>2</sup> The people of India were prepared to accept nothing short of *purna Swaraj*.

### *Ramgarh Resolution and After:*

In March 1940, the fifty third session of the Congress met at Ramgarh in Bihar under the presidency of Maulana Azad. It passed a resolution on 20 March declaring that since Great Britain was waging the war essentially for imperialist ends and for the preservation and strengthening of her own empire, India could not "in any way, directly or indirectly, become party to the War . . . . ." Stating that "India's constitution must be based on independence, democracy and national unity", the resolution repudiated "attempts to divide India or to split up her nationhood". It reiterated that nothing short of complete independence would be acceptable to the people of India.<sup>3</sup> This Congress also passed a resolution condemning

the assassination of Michael O'Dwyer as an act of insanity and expressing its condolence to the bereaved family\*.

The *Mail* regretted the Ramgarh resolution demanding complete independence. The Muslim Press and the *Vidutalai* of Ramaswami Naicker condemned it outright. The resolution earned considerable resentment in official circles and pressure was put on the Viceroy to hit back. The Viceroy, however, did not yield to reactionary advice. This stance of the Viceroy was revealed in the letter of Shiva Rao to Editor K. Srinivasan of *The Hindu*.<sup>4</sup> The latter sent a copy of it to Rajaji for his remarks. Rajaji frankly expressed his view that the Congress goal of independence could be reached through acceptance of the Dominion Status if it was to be definitely offered by the British. But he also made it clear that it was the attitude and approach of the Viceroy and the Government to the Indian issue that drove Gandhiji to this "new firm conclusion" that so long as the British connection continued, there would be no Indian unity.<sup>5</sup>

Rajaji's view on Dominion Status was shared by many Congress leaders in the Presidency. Since Dominion Status would confer on India full control over all its internal and external affairs, and also the right to secede, they wanted the Congress to accept Dominion Status and Federation. Satyamurti, for instance, presumed to define the Congress stand on Federation and charged its President Subhas Bose with waging a raging and tearing campaign against the federal scheme.<sup>6</sup> He once said, "If the safeguards of the Viceroy's go the way those of the Governors did; if the British undertake to bear the cost of the British troops in India; if at least a portion of the defence expenditure is made subject to the vote of the House; if India is placed in the same position as any other self-governing Dominion in the matter of foreign affairs; and if the Church is disestablished in India, I for one, will recommend to the Congress the

\* On 13 March 1940 took place a shooting outrage in London when Zetland (Secretary of State for India) and Michael O'Dwyer (former Lt. Governor of the Punjab) were shot by one Udham Singh. The victims were at a meeting of the East India Association in Caxton Hall, London. While Zetland escaped, O'Dwyer died on the spot. Udham Singh, an eye witness to the Punjab tragedy of 1919, wreaked vengeance on O'Dwyer after biding his time for more than twenty years. Udham Singh surrendered to the police. He confessed at the time of his trial his jubilation at O'Dwyer's death and regret at Zetland's escape. He attempted at the latter's life because Zetland decried respectable Congress leaders. When death sentence was passed on him, Udham Singh declared that he was gladly laying down his life for his motherland. He left the Court shouting *Vande Mataram* (CWMG., Vol. LXXI p. 334).



acceptance of Federation as a transitional solution".<sup>7</sup> Satyamurti made it very clear that he was not for the Federation Scheme as offered by the British. The Congress too was not opposed to Federation *per se*, but to the form of Federation offered by the British. He did not dispute the fact that the Scheme offered was far from satisfactory. But since it was not immutable, it could be amended to suit India. He made these statements as a practical Parliamentarian. But the Congress Working Committee took strong exception to them. It was pointed out that as the Deputy Leader of the Congress party in the Central Assembly, Satyamurti should have exercised greater self-restraint.<sup>8</sup>

Stating that he never disputed the right of India either to self-determination or to independence, C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, then Dewan and President of the Travancore Legislative Assembly, stated at Trivandrum: "... to ask that an unarmed India should discard even Dominion Status and protection of British forces and should demand independence is to pursue a mirage and cling to the illusion that the doctrine of non-violence can be carried into effect in a world full of violence".<sup>9</sup>

Three days after the passing of the Ramgarh resolution i.e., on 23 March, the All India Muslim League held its annual session at Lahore where for the first time it put forward its demand for "Pakistan" in an indirect way. Its resolution demanded that "geographically contiguous units" in the north western and eastern zones of India "should be grouped to constitute 'independent states' in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign".<sup>10</sup> Jinnah's contention was that since the Government of India was taken away from the Muslims by the British, it had to be restored to them. Ere long, the "Jinnah complex" had begun to obsess the official mind.<sup>11</sup>

### *Rajaji's strategy:*

About three months after the Ramgarh Congress, the Tinnevely District Political Conference was held at Ambasamudram. Presiding over its session, Rajaji said if India enthusiastically extended her co-operation in the war effort, there was every possibility of Britain giving her in return a substantial share in the administration of India. He persuaded the Congress to accept a resolution to the effect that if there was a declaration that India would be free at the end of the War and if an all-party national government was formed

right away, the Congress would prosecute the War as an ally of Britain. This offer of Indian participation in war efforts ran counter to the Gandhian principle of non-violence. For the first time in twenty years Rajaji disobeyed Gandhiji.<sup>12</sup>

The Congress Working Committee which met at Wardha in June 1940, reiterated after five days of hectic debate (17–21 June) the country's strict adherence to the principle of non-violence in its struggle for independence but declared its inability "to go the full length with Gandhiji". It, however, recognised that Gandhiji "should be free to pursue his great ideal in his own way".<sup>13</sup> It was at this session that Gandhiji expressed a desire to be absolved from the activities of the Congress. And he was relieved. The Working Committee opined that India had not "the strength to exercise *ahimsa* against the invasion of a foreign foe".<sup>14</sup> The opposition was led by Rajaji at the next meeting held on 3 July at Delhi. When Gandhiji said that India would defend itself non-violently so far as the Congress was concerned, Rajaji retorted: "I cannot go with Gandhiji in his conception of the State. Ours is a political organisation not working for non-violence but for political ideal. We are working in competition with other political parties". He highlighted the limits of non-violence in conducting the affairs of men. This had made such a profound impression even on Jawaharlal Nehru who endorsed Rajaji's stand stating, "I agree with Rajaji in his understanding of violence and non-violence; else, we cannot function on the political plane".<sup>15</sup>

Rajaji was able to win over the majority of the Working Committee to his side including President Maulana Azad and Vallabhbhai Patel. Thus a grievous difference arose between Gandhiji and the Working Committee on the question of applying the principle of non-violence. Whereas Gandhiji wanted it to be applied in all spheres of life not excluding the defence of India, the Working Committee was firm that it should be restricted to the struggle for freedom.

Four days later, on 7 July, the Working Committee passed a resolution calling upon Britain to acknowledge the complete independence of India and to give immediate effect to it by the constitution of a Provisional National Government at the centre. The Working Committee declared that the adoption of these measures would enable the Congress to organise effectively for the defence of the country.<sup>16</sup> This resolution, which was passed after deliberations lasting over five solid days (3 to 7 July), was a departure



from the spirit of the earlier Ramgarh resolution. Gandhiji described the resolution as "fateful".<sup>17</sup>

In a persuasive speech delivered three weeks after the Delhi meet, Rajaji said that the Delhi resolution had only restated the Congress position. He averred that it was similar in content to the one passed at Ramgarh but different in approach owing to changes in the political conditions since then. Rajaji then recalled how Gandhiji himself who adumbrated his policy of non-violence in *Hind-Swaraj* in 1913, went round the country in 1917, actively recruiting men for the army during the First World War. He cited this precedent to show there was nothing dishonourable in making an offer of co-operation to the British in their war effort if India were to be given independence.<sup>18</sup>

Gandhiji was relieved of the leadership of the Congress on the issue of renouncing violence even for the defence of India. The tense atmosphere was, however, eased considerably when Gandhiji himself said, "If my position was not acceptable, then Rajaji's was the only real alternative".<sup>19</sup> The authentic prophet that he was, Gandhiji prognosticated the breach in the Congress to be a passing phase. He had the least doubt that Rajaji and Patel would be back with him. However, the happenings did pain him. He confessed that he had no difficulty in the past in "carrying Rajaji with me, his intelligence as well as his heart but since this office question cropped up, I saw that our thoughts were running in different directions. I see that I cannot carry him now along with me . . . . ."<sup>20</sup>

When Rajaji was interviewed by the Associated Press correspondent on 11 July, regarding the Delhi resolution he repeated that since the war had lost its aggressive nature "the defence of India is now an integral part of the defence of Britain. This is the key to understand the resolution of the Congress Working Committee".<sup>21</sup> A week later, on 18 July, while explaining the differences of opinion on the matter of extension of non-violence to the field of national self-defence, Rajaji said in Madras that there was no rupture between Gandhiji and the Congress High Command.<sup>22</sup>

The AICC which met at Poona from 25 to 28 July ratified the Delhi resolution of the Working Committee.<sup>23</sup> Intelligent public opinion throughout India welcomed this development.<sup>24</sup> Rajaji had, of course, his own doubts about the acceptance of the Congress proposal by the British Government. Because he knew that the views of the senior Civil Servants who advised the Viceroy and the Secretary of State were "reactionary and out of date". Even before the Poona

meet Rajaji stated: “. . . . . I cannot give in to Britain’s arrogance . . . . . I have gone to the point that Honour can take us to, and I cannot surrender any further and I am prepared for the worst thereafter. I see no greatness of conduct in (British Government’s) present attitude towards India”.<sup>25</sup>

*Perverse gesture:*

The proposal of the Congress was rejected by the Viceroy who announced on 7 August his decision to expand his Council further by appointing representative Indians. He also announced his decision to establish a War Advisory Council. He added that the Government would set up “a body of representatives of principal elements in India’s national life” soon after the war to frame a new constitution. In other words, the British Government could not countenance the Congress demand for leaving the power and authority over the people of India in the latter’s hands.<sup>26</sup>

The Viceroy’s rejection of the Poona offer was clear proof that Britain’s real intention was not to confer independence on India but to hold her in bondage and exploit her indefinitely. The Viceroy’s attitude disillusioned every patriotic Indian. It was obvious that Britain was “perversely obstinate” in denying India her due. As a seasoned journalist put it, if the British brought about “the political unity of India, Lord Linlithgow undid it by strengthening the force of (divisive) Parties”.<sup>27</sup> Thereafter the Government became most intolerant in its dealings with the Indians. The Indian public was denied even the freedom to express its opinion against the British Government for dragging India into the Second World War.

It was with a view to ending the deadlock in the country and promoting the national cause in co-operation with the British that the Working Committee made a proposal to the British in their Delhi resolution. It was done at the cost of alienating Gandhiji from the Congress High Command. The Viceroy’s action in mercilessly spurning a rare offer only helped to widen the gulf between “India as represented by the Congress” and England. The Viceroy’s declaration took no note of the smouldering discontent in the country. Gandhiji observed: “My own fear is that democracy is being wrecked. Britain cannot claim to stand for justice, if she fails to be just for India. India’s disease is too deep to yield to any make believe or half-hearted measure”.<sup>28</sup> Public opinion outside the pale of



the Congress too did not welcome the Viceroy's announcement.

Rajaji appeared to be the most affected by the Viceroy's gesture as he was the author of the proposal and had taken the lead in the move to come to terms with the British Government. During his tour of the Andhra region, undertaken soon after the Viceroy's pronouncement, Rajaji exploded at public meetings. He told his mammoth audience on 11 August at Ellore: "I am clear the Viceroy's statement will not satisfy me. I am angry with it. I want you also to feel like it".<sup>29</sup> At another meeting in Rajahmundry he thundered: "The Indian people's will would unsettle the settled fact".<sup>30</sup>

The Congress Working Committee which met at Wardha from 18 to 22 August rejected the Viceroy's offer of 8 August as it fell far short of its demand. The Committee stated that this offer and the subsequent speech of the Secretary of State in the House of Commons on 14 August stressing the differences between the two political parties in India, were wholly opposed to the best interests of India. The Congress could not therefore be a party to the acceptance of the offer. The Committee voiced the prevailing apprehension that the British Indian administration was bent on maintaining and aggravating differences in India's national life. It called upon the people of India to condemn the attitude of the Government through public meetings and their elected representatives in the Provincial legislatures.<sup>31</sup> As *The Hindu* rightly observed, the decision was not "prompted by *amour propre*" but by the realisation that Britain would never treat India as a free and equal partner.<sup>32</sup>

Rajaji made a "sporting offer" at this juncture to Britain in an interview to the London based *Daily Herald*: if Britain would agree to a provisional national government at once, he would persuade his colleagues in the Congress to agree to the Muslim League being invited to nominate a Prime Minister and to let the latter form a national government as he—the Muslim Prime Minister—considered best. Rajaji's offer made a great impression in the Muslim League circles as a "magnificent gesture". *Star India*, a Muslim newspaper of Bengal found the proposal "electrifying".<sup>33</sup> But the British Government refused to discuss it. Amery, Secretary of State, ruled out any fresh approach to the Indian question. Wrote Shiva Rao: "In any event, it is felt that the British Government cannot any longer shield itself behind the Congress-League differences after C.R's offer and withhold a national Government from India".<sup>34</sup>

*Individual Satyagraha: Preparatory measures:*

As Gandhiji predicted, the Congress once again looked to him for counsel and lead. The AICC meeting at Bombay on 15 and 16 September resolved that the Government's policy of suppressing free expression of public opinion against India's participation in the War amounted to "imposing upon the Congress a struggle for the preservation of the honour and the elementary rights of the people".<sup>35</sup> The Committee requested Gandhiji to guide the Congress in the action to be taken. The leaders wanted him to guide them in the application of satyagraha in the peculiar situation that obtained in 1940. Rajaji also supported this move. Thus Rajaji was back with Gandhiji and so was Patel. Gandhiji responded to their appeal by devising resistance to British war efforts by means of Individual Satyagraha. However, before embarking on it, Gandhiji met the Viceroy at Simla on 27 September. The Viceroy was unyielding though courteous. Gandhiji did not even press for the immediate transfer of power at the Centre. He was prepared to wait until the end of the war provided the Government relieved India from the War and granted Indians the freedom to speak against the war. But the Viceroy rejected these demands. Gandhiji commented: "The British is showing extraordinary bravery on the battlefield in a marvellous manner. But he lacks bravery to take risks in the moral domain. I often wonder whether the latter has any place in British politics".<sup>36</sup>

The Viceroy's rejection of Gandhiji's appeal for freedom of expression prepared the ground for Individual Satyagraha. Gandhiji made it clear that in the great struggle it was then engaged, Britain could not expect any help from the Congress. But he assured that the Congress leaders bore no ill-will to Britain.<sup>37</sup> The Satyagrahis would not embarrass the Government by demanding independence at that critical juncture when Britain's very existence hung in the balance. They only wanted the right to protest against being involved in the war. Hence Gandhiji ruled out mass civil disobedience. He decided to restrict the campaign to the "fewest possible typical individuals" who were to observe scrupulously the spirit of non-violence. The objective of the satyagraha was restricted to demanding the right to preach against the war. India had been forced to contribute to and participate in the War because she was an imperial possession with no independent status. The Congress insisted on the people's right to refuse to participate in



a war waged purely to save British imperialism. The British claimed that whatever help they had received till then was voluntary. To which Rajaji replied that such a claim could be justified only if the right to preach non-participation in the war was respected.<sup>38</sup> But the Government suppressed and incarcerated those who preached it.

The decision for individual satyagraha was not taken on the spur of the moment. Gandhiji had long been preparing for this kind of civil disobedience. He had in fact taken more than a year to reach a decision on the Individual Satyagraha Movement. He had a clear-cut plan in starting and conducting this symbolic movement which was to vindicate the principle of non-violence. In keeping with this principle, he took all care to keep the Movement “within limits and absolutely innocuous”. Keen on quality instead of quantity, Gandhiji expected prospective Satyagrahis to suspend all private activities and to keep a log-book of their daily activities in furtherance of the constructive programme which was the “foundation of civil disobedience”. It was a severe preliminary test for the satyagrahis. It was decided to grant permission to offer satyagraha to deserving persons only after an examination of their log-books. The satyagrahis were carefully chosen by Gandhiji himself with the help of J.B. Kripalani,\* Mahadev Desai,\*\* and Rajendra Prasad.\*\*\*

The Provinces prepared the Satyagrahis’ lists out of the panels sent from the districts and passed them on to Gandhiji. Gandhiji went through each list carefully, scoring out certain names and calling for fresh reports in the case of others. Volunteers were thus admitted to the campaign only after the closest scrutiny.<sup>39</sup>

### *Satyagraha Launched:*

The campaign was inaugurated on 7 October 1940 when Vinoba Bhave<sup>†</sup> offered Individual Civil Disobedience as the first satyagrahi. He started his march making anti-war speeches in the village of Paunar and was arrested. He was sentenced to three months’ imprisonment. Jawaharlal Nehru was the second satyagrahi. He was arrested even before he formally began the campaign ostensibly for speeches made months ago at Gorakhpur. He was sentenced to

\*General Secretary of the Congress.

\*\*Gandhiji’s Secretary.

\*\*\*President, Indian National Congress (1934).

<sup>†</sup>Sanskrit Scholar; resident in Gandhiji’s *Ashram* from its inception; later, founded the *Bhoodan Movement*.

four years' rigorous imprisonment, a "savage" sentence indeed. Non-Congressmen and even Europeans regarded the sentence unduly harsh. This provocative act forced Gandhiji to extend the scope of the civil disobedience to include members of the Working Committee, the AICC and the Central and Provincial legislatures.<sup>40</sup> After the arrest of Maulana Azad in January 1941, it was further extended and all representative Congressmen — from the members of the village Committees to those of the Provincial ones — were expected to court imprisonment.<sup>41</sup>

There were meetings and demonstrations in every district in the Presidency of Madras protesting against the conviction of Nehru. Even the Moderates of the Presidency were unanimous in their opinion that the British Government should make a positive declaration that it would give India freedom to determine her own constitution after the War. As a proof of her earnestness, they wanted Britain to form forthwith a national Government at the centre and responsible Government in the Provinces.<sup>42</sup>

Students organised strikes in many parts but the agitations in Madras and Vizagapatam assumed serious proportions. Students in some parts of Andhra pledged to work for Hindu-Muslim harmony and burnt an effigy of British imperialism. A general strike was threatened for 14 November 1940. But the Government forestalled the move issuing a *communique* disapproving the students' conduct and warning the ring leaders, of permanent exclusion from possible employment in Government service in the future. In the case of Government Colleges, steps were ordered to be taken for the expulsion of student demonstrators. The students revolted against the *communique*. In Vizagapatam, the University authorities punished the revolvers. Later, when the Governor visited the Andhra University, the students boycotted him. But the Government consoled itself saying that their boycott was directed more against the Vice-Chancellor's action in punishing the students who participated in the "Nehru Conviction Protest Strike" than against the Governor.<sup>43</sup>

In the Annamalai University, the administration had a tough task in holding back the agitators. On receiving information that the students had affiliation with the Communists, the police went to the University to make searches. In the meantime, the students got to know what was afoot and assembled in a body to decide their next course of action. Their attitude being so definitely hostile, the police



withdrew without achieving its object lest it should run into risk of a riot.<sup>44</sup>

The moderates in the Presidency were, however, against Individual Satyagraha. P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer called it “most foolish, ill-advised and calculated to jeopardise the safety and best interest of the country”.<sup>45</sup> But this was expected of the Moderates who had never blessed any of the Movements launched by the Congress under Gandhiji’s stewardship. Even erstwhile Congressmen like S. Srinivasa Iyengar spoke derogatively of the Individual Satyagraha. Presiding over a meeting at Alandur (near Madras) on 7 October 1940, he criticised the Satyagraha and called the creed of non-violence “a gospel of cowardice”. According to him acceptance of that creed was no patriotism but “a direct invitation to other countries to invade India and plunder the country as happened formerly”.<sup>46</sup> Srinivasa Iyengar had resigned from the Congress in 1930 owing to differences with Gandhiji. So fed up was he with the Gandhian creed of non-violence that he declared it was good only for *Sanyasins*. He even advised Gandhiji to retire from politics and remain in recluse.\*

Notwithstanding these accusations of both Congress and non-Congressmen, the Individual Satyagraha was organised in almost all parts of the Presidency—Tamil Nadu, Andhra, South Canara and Malabar. Everywhere Congress Committees were formed; anti-war speeches were made; anti-war pamphlets were distributed; and anti-war posters were displayed. The Tamil and Andhra Provincial Congress Committees transformed themselves into Satyagraha Councils and enrolled volunteers. All this anti-war propaganda led to a very large number of arrests and imprisonments for different terms. The Government imposed a press censorship on publication of news relating to the Satyagraha.

Among the most prominent Congress leaders in the Presidency who were arrested and sent to jail for offering Individual Satyagraha, were Rajaji and Satyamurti. On 1 December 1940, Rajaji wrote letters to all the members of the Provincial War Committee

\* Two other South Indian leaders who counselled the same were Satyamurti and Srinivasa Sastri. When Gandhiji refused to lift the ban on attendance at the Central Assembly which was imposed in 1939, an irate Satyamurti advised him to withdraw to the Himalayas if he could not reconcile himself to the legislative arena. Srinivasa Sastri put it rather mildly that Gandhiji would do the greatest benefit to India and to the world at large, if he withdrew from politics and remained a saint.

including the Mayor of Madras, Muthiah Chetty, (leader of the Opposition in the Madras Legislative Assembly), and Abdul Hamid Khan (leader of the Muslim League group in the Assembly), requesting all of them not to help the British War with men and money. Rajaji sent a copy of his letter to the British authorities also so as to provoke and enable them to take action against him.<sup>47</sup>

Rajaji was arrested on 3 December. Magistrate Abbas Ali who tried Rajaji sentenced him to one year imprisonment. Although he had only performed his duty as a Magistrate, Ali was emotionally upset at having had to do the same. He quoted from the *Bhagvad Gita* to justify the unpleasant duty he had to perform. "No one will rejoice more than myself when peace is declared and Mr. Rajagopalachari returns from jail and occupies the high position which he held with such distinction". Thanking the Magistrate, Rajaji said: "I am sorry myself I have caused you a certain amount of embarrassment".<sup>48</sup>

Satyamurti offered Individual Satyagraha on 13 December by shouting anti-war slogans. He was arrested and sentenced to nine months' simple imprisonment. His statement before the Court was: "The least one can do without deliberately seeking to embarrass the Government is to say to the world and to our people that until India's freedom is assured, India can have no part or lot in the War".<sup>49</sup> While serving his term in the Vellore jail, Satyamurti fell seriously ill and was shifted to the General Hospital in Madras still a prisoner under police custody for treatment. After a stint of treatment, he was once again confined to the penitentiary. When G. A. Natesan sought the permission of the Madras Government to see Satyamurti who was very ill, the Government warned him against such a call. It asked whether Natesan as Chairman of one of the War Sub-Committees could associate himself with people who had deliberately indulged in anti-war propaganda to have themselves committed to prison. Reminding him of the unpleasantness which his visit to Rajaji on the eve of the latter's departure to jail had created, it stated that a "visit to convicts in jail might provoke an even wilder storm".<sup>50</sup>

All the former Ministers of the Rajaji Cabinet offered Individual Satyagraha and courted imprisonment. The burden of their anti-war speeches was against India being drawn into the war which served no purpose for her and which meant the "moral and material ruin of the nation". The satyagrahis attacked the mobilisation of the



war fund which was often raised on coercion. T.S.S. Rajan was jailed even before Rajaji. He opened the campaign in Trichinopoly in November. He was convicted and sentenced to one year rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 1000 or in default to undergo 6 months further imprisonment.<sup>51</sup> Except Yakub Hasan who was no more, all the Ministers "jumped from their Secretariat to the Prison House".<sup>52</sup> Among the members of the Central Legislative Assembly who were arrested, the most popular leaders were C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar, T.S. Avinashilingam Chetty and P.S. Kumaraswami Raja. B. Sambamurti, Rukmani Lakshmipati (Deputy Speaker of the Madras Legislative Assembly), K. Venkataswamy Naidu, M. Bhaktavatsalam, N.S. Varadachari, M. Bapineedu, Ahmad Thambi Mohideen Maricar, Kaleswara Rao, K.R. Karanth, P.S. Murti and A.B. Shetty were the other public figures to court arrest. N.G. Ranga, the peasants' spokesman in Andhra, was punished as early as March 1940 for delivering anti-war speeches in public. Under the Defence of India Rule 26, the Government forbade him to make public speeches and directed him to reside in his village in Nidabrolu (Guntur). He was given 24 hours in which to move to Nidabrolu.<sup>53</sup>

To start with, the satyagraha was offered in Madras city and 8 districts. Later, it was extended to 12 more districts. Prosecutions under the Defence of India Act were launched in the Madras city and the districts of Anantpur, South Arcot, Chittoor, Coimbatore, East Godavari, West Godavari, Chingleput, Kurnool, Madura, Malabar, Nellore, Ramnad, Salem, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Tinnevely and Vizagapatam. In Krishna district, Kaleswara Rao was arrested before he could commit satyagraha because of the fear of the district authorities that the actual commission of the offence by him would lead to great public excitement. In Malabar, a good deal of popular interest was generated in this Movement. Satyagrahi Kelappan marched from Calicut to Quilon where he actually committed satyagraha. The satyagrahis in Malabar distributed copies of Jawaharlal Nehru's statement in the Gorakhpur Court at the time of his trial. The District Magistrate was strictly instructed to stop it.<sup>54</sup> In the East Godavari District, the Satyagrahis circulated leaflets asking people who were compelled to contribute to the War Fund to report the matter to the Congress.<sup>55</sup>

The Individual Satyagraha Movement in the Presidency continued unabated into 1941 although many leaders were already in

jail. Persons from the commercial and land owning classes as well as publicists went to jail in 1941. Among them Pallikkottai Nadi-muthu Pillai, Nachiappa Goundar of Salem, T.S. Chokkalingam (Editor, *Dinamani*, a Tamil daily), S.S. Vasan (Editor, *Ananda Vikatan*, a Tamil weekly) and R. Krishnamurti (Editor, *Kalki*, a Tamil weekly), deserve special mention. Among scholars who were jailed may be mentioned T.P. Meenakshisundaram Pillai, Tirunavukkarasu (son of Maraimalai Adikal), Nilavati Ramasubrahmanian and M.P. Sivagnanam.<sup>56</sup> The sentences awarded to the satyagrahis were severe, the fines heavy. And they were not uniform. In the initial phase of the satyagraha itself, there were glaring contrasts between the sentences awarded to Vinobha Bhave and Jawaharlal Nehru. Later, however, the sentences were less harsh, the duration not exceeding 2 to 4 months. In Coimbatore, a satyagrahi was sentenced to six months imprisonment for his speech delivered at a reception got up to celebrate his release! The number of arrests and fines imposed on satyagrahis arrested in the Presidency as issued by the AICC office at Sevagram is as follows:<sup>57</sup>

<i>Regions</i>	<i>No. of Arrests</i>	<i>Fines in Rupees</i>
Andhra	882	76533
Karnataka	210	5385
Kerala	70	5700
Tamil Nad	424	29030

As the Movement gained momentum, more and more people came forward to offer satyagraha and court imprisonment. As a result, the Government was eventually compelled to ignore all but the leaders and to arrest only those who were influential. Gandhiji instructed the non-arrested satyagrahis to perform *pada yatra* (to march on foot) to Delhi carrying on anti-war propaganda on the way. It was then that the slogan *Chalo Dilli* (go to Delhi) was raised. Later, however, finding that the people in the Madras Presidency were hard put to it, Gandhiji commissioned them to carry on house-to-house, man-to-man propaganda in the villages.<sup>58</sup>

It may not be out of place to review here the varied reactions of some of the British Civil Servants to the Satyagraha. The eccentricities of Galletti, ICS, Divisional Magistrate of Gudur (Nellore District), would make amusing reading. He tried to gain popularity



not only by advising the police against prosecuting the smaller fry but also by joining the public meetings and arguing with people the pros and cons of the Congress Movement. He lectured to the satyagrahis in his court, attended their meetings and gave them unsolicited advice. In a certain case he allowed the Civil resisters to shout anti-war slogans and told them to march to Delhi! The public was amused by his antics only for some time. He could not be dismissed as a harmless bore because he was too conscious of his power and pelf. *The Hindu* wrote a critical leader "Magistrate on the Flying Trapeze" which it concluded thus: ". . . . As he (Galletti) is obviously unable to see the impropriety of a Magistrate functioning like a *vaude ville* artist, it is high time that the Government transferred him to a sphere more suited to his talents and tastes. To Mr. Galletti himself a word of advice would not be amiss. As a keen student of the old fabulists, he should be familiar with the story of our Simian cousin in the *Panchatantra* which, in its zeal for setting the world to rights, came to grief with a wedge. Moral: the cobbler should stick to his last".<sup>59</sup>

The admonitory speeches of C.H. Masterman, Collector of Vizagapatam also deserve notice. He went out of the way to predict a horrid future for India under Germany, if the latter succeeded in defeating Britain. It would not only be a tale of misery, starvation and slavery for India, but also a ruthless extermination of the economically unwanted. He thus sought to frighten away prospective satyagrahis from the Movement with all emphasis he could command. He also reminded that according to Nazism humanity consisted of "one race that rules, the German race and a number of other races, all and always inferior".<sup>60</sup> Many Indians themselves who were opposed to the Satyagraha, spoke in a similar vein, stressing that Britain's fall would not be to the benefit of India. They asked whether the Congress could argue with Hitler as it did with the British Government if Germany won. C.R. Reddy said that Hitler himself had stated in his *Mein Kampf* that "he is a great lover of the British Empire and that he wants it to be preserved but that the coloured peoples should be governed by the sword and the lathi".<sup>61</sup>

### *The Hindu's Mediation:*

*The Hindu* was consistently making appeals to the Congress to call off the Satyagraha. It pointed out the danger of the main Con-

gress Movement for 'Swaraj' being sidetracked by this satyagraha against the war. The Congress, it went on, had a great obligation both to itself and to the people who had reposed their faith in it. During the first half of 1941, K. Srinivasan, its Editor had been doing a lot unobtrusively through B. Shiva Rao to end the political stalemate and to bring about a *rapprochement* between Gandhiji and the Viceroy. He was also constantly keeping in touch with Rajaji who played a crucial role in the politics of India during this period.

Srinivasan strove hard to get the Viceroy agree to the formula prepared by Sikandar Hyat Khan, the Premier of the Punjab. The formula envisaged the drafting of a constitution by a representative committee of all the Premiers and ex-Premiers of the Provinces on the basis of full Dominion Status; it also provided for the formation of coalition Ministries in the Provinces and a reconstitution of the Central Government with the transfer of all subjects to Indians with certain conditions. Srinivasan met the Viceroy on 4 February to discuss the formula. But the latter refused to commit himself to anything towards solving the deadlock without reference to London. Sikandar then expressed his desire to know whether Rajaji would agree to the scheme. Thereupon Srinivasan met Rajaji at the jail on 21 February after obtaining permission to do so from Governor Hope. Rajaji who was in favour of it wanted Sikandar to go ahead. He, however, warned that Gandhiji would not agree to Congressmen taking office and helping positively in the war effort. As for Jinnah, he would not discuss the Muslim League demand with anyone except Gandhiji.<sup>62</sup>

On 15 March 1941, a conference of non-party leaders was convened at Bombay. This conference urged the Government to reconstitute the Government of India with Indian members. Commending the proposal, *The Hindu* appealed to the Government to accept it and to the Congress to end the Satyagraha Movement. Since the Movement had achieved its purpose of dissociation from the war, *The Hindu* argued, there was no need to prolong it. But Gandhiji declined to call it to a halt. Jinnah issued a statement in May 1941 that the conference was engineered by the agents of the Congress and the Hindu Maha Sabha to offer an alibi to the Congress and Gandhiji to call off the Satyagraha. He even attributed the authorship of the resolution to Rajaji. Jinnah's allegation was based on E.V. Ramaswami Naicker's statement that Rajaji pressed K. Srinivasan towards such a move and that the latter in turn prevailed



upon Sapru to convene a conference and pass a resolution which to all intents and purposes was drafted by Rajaji. Because it welcomed the resolution, Jinnah called *The Hindu* an out and out Congress paper. The Bombay proposal died a natural death when Amery rejected it.<sup>63</sup>

When Srinivasan met the Viceroy again in June 1941, the former was given to understand confidentially that some policy statement was getting ready. On 21 July 1941 a *communique* was issued from Simla by the Government of India announcing the expansion of the Viceroy's Executive Council by the appointment of 7 more Indians and also the constitution of a War Advisory Council. The announcement was met with general disapprobation as it did not mean the transfer of an iota of real power. *The Hindu* stated that the announcement had demonstrated once again "the Britishers' unblest genius for sowing dissension and manoeuvring for position in the internal game of breaking to the heart promises made to the ear. . . . ."<sup>64</sup>

Even the Muslims and the non-Brahman press in the Presidency did not welcome the announcement. The retention of the more important portfolios with the European members of the Council was cited as an illustration of the British Government's unwillingness to part with power. *The Mail* said that a Defence Portfolio could have been created and given over to an Indian.<sup>65</sup> Gandhiji stated that it did not affect the stand taken by the Congress nor did it meet the Congress demand to any extent.<sup>66</sup>

With the expansion of the Executive Council of the Viceroy, the Government of India had become a predominantly Indian Government in terms of numbers. *The Hindu* now repeated its appeals to the new Executive Council also. It pleaded for the modification of the British policy in two vital respects: (i) to press for the unconditional release of political prisoners and (2) to solve the communal problem. The paper made yet another appeal to Gandhiji in October 1941 to give up the satyagraha and revise the policy of the Congress in the best interests of the Country.

#### *Release of Prisoners: Lukewarm response:*

On 4 December, the Government of India announced its decision to release all civil disobedience prisoners whose offences were "merely formal and symbolic in character". This was the effect of seventeen days of debate in the Central Assembly. But many were disappointed as the amnesty was restricted to civil disobedience

prisoners alone. Gandhiji was the least impressed. The discharge of the satyagrahis had no meaning for him because, as per the new directive issued on 17 June 1941, a released satyagrahi must seek to offer satyagraha again as soon as possible. Were he unable to do so, he must apply to the party High Command for exemption from offering satyagraha stating reasons therefor. It was incomprehensible to Gandhiji that those who had voluntarily courted imprisonment were to be discharged and not those who were either detained without trial or imprisoned because they held the liberty of their motherland dearer than their own personal freedom. “. . . . I can not rejoice over the Government of India's decision”.<sup>67</sup>

The political detenus were treated badly in the jails. Their food was bad. They were lathicharged inside the prison. In Vellore jail there was a hunger strike when the satyagrahis were treated as ordinary criminals. As a result, the enthusiasm of the satyagrahis had waned completely by the time they were released. Out of the 2093 Individual Satyagrahis, only 59 courted arrest for a second time.<sup>68</sup> Many of them felt it was high time the campaign was called off.

Both Satyamurti and Rajaji were in favour of giving up even the restricted civil disobedience. They advocated the resumption of ministerial office on suitable political terms. Satyamurti was released on 23 August and his health was still indifferent. But despite illness, he made a speech at a reception at the Congress grounds in Royapettah got up to honour him on the day of his release. He advised the Congress to call off Satyagraha and permit its members to accept office in the Provinces and resume its legitimate place in the seat of Government. Many Congressmen supported him. Satyamurti then wrote to Gandhiji making three suggestions. First, the Congress should resume power; second, the Congress party in the Central Legislature should be permitted to function again as an Opposition from October 1941; and third, the Congress Ministries should resume office in the Provincial legislatures. If the Government did not permit the Congress to do so, it should resort to a nation-wide campaign, for the acceptance of the National Demand.<sup>69</sup> Gandhiji responded promptly but his reply was too harsh. Reprimanding Satyamurti for his speech on 23 August which was stated to have been made in “indecent haste”, Gandhiji advised him rest.<sup>70</sup> Undaunted by these, Satyamurti later met Gandhiji but the latter held no hope of change of policy regarding office acceptance.<sup>71</sup>

Rajaji who was released 3 months after Satyamurti's discharge,



also spoke in a similar vein. He went so far as to pronounce that the Individual Satyagraha Movement was a total failure. He made this statement while delivering the convocation address at the Lucknow University.<sup>72</sup> But he was the lone Member of the Congress Working Committee to make such a statement. This convocation afforded Rajaji a chance to make such a weighty pronouncement on the burning issue of non-violence. He also dwelt on his differences with Gandhiji and said “(we) keep our face turned steadily in the direction of *ahimsa* but cannot make the mistake of killing the principle itself by opposing it to commonsense or reality. The defence of India is a case to be treated as an exception”.<sup>73</sup>

Speeches of leaders like Rajaji had a great impact on the civil resisters. There was a decisive waning in their enthusiasm after their release. Fewer people came forward to offer satyagraha. Those released did not seek imprisonment again on account of the agonising situation prevailing in the jails. Many suffered in health and needed absolute rest. There was no discipline among some satyagrahis too who had not grasped properly the concept of non-violence. Many therefore eagerly looked forward to the suspension of the satyagraha.

On 30 December 1941, the Congress Working Committee meeting at Bardoli reaffirmed its adherence to the resolution of the AICC passed in Bombay on 16 September 1940.<sup>74</sup> However, while the session was still on, Gandhiji wrote to Maulana Azad that he should be relieved of the responsibility laid upon him by the Bombay resolution.\*<sup>75</sup> Gandhiji's request was accepted. The Working Committee therefore laid no specific programme of action. All the same it said that the Bombay resolution still held good.

The AICC met at Wardha on 15 January 1942 to discuss matters relating to the Working of the Congress organisation. The Committee issued instructions to Congressmen on the celebration of the Independence Day, the refunctioning of the Congress Committees and the involvement of primary members. Since civil disobedience was suspended, the Independence Day pledge was so amended as to delete from it portions relating to the Individual

\* Gandhiji stated that on re-reading the Bombay resolution he found that he had committed a grave error in interpreting the same on the principle of non-violence. In his own words, “I have read into it a meaning which its letter could not bear. The discovery of the error makes it impossible for me to lead the Congress in the struggle for resistance to war effort. . . . . .”

Civil Disobedience Movement. Gandhiji had himself recommended the Bardoli resolution which withdrew the power of attorney conferred on him. This meeting was memorable for another announcement of Gandhiji. He publicly made a statement on the question of his successor when he said, "I have always said that not Rajaji, nor Sardar Vallabhbhai,\* but Jawaharlal will be my successor".<sup>76</sup>

At Wardha Patel, Prasad and Nehru registered their opposition to discarding the Satyagraha. But Rajaji spoke for 75 minutes taking pains to explain his conception of non-violence. He said it would not prohibit even an old man like himself from responding to the call to join the war in defence of his country's freedom if the British created the condition for it. Now that the Congress had suspended the Satyagraha and adopted an attitude of neutrality, it was for the British Government to accept or reject the offer extended to them. He added that rejection of the offer a second time would not be in the interest of Britain itself.

#### *The Justice-League Compact:*

While the National Congress was seriously fighting for the unity of India, the Justice party in league with the Madras branch of the Muslim League was working in right earnest to separate the Dravidanad from the rest of India. E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, who had become the recognized leader of the Justice party first tried in vain to enlist the British Government's support for the Dravidian proposition. Soon after the War broke out, he offered the Government the wholehearted and unconditional support of the Tamils to the *Raj* in the prosecution of the war as "a counterblast to the Congress attitude".<sup>77</sup> At the Justice party conference convened on 2 June 1940, Naicker passed a resolution urging the establishment of Dravidanad. He also unveiled a map of Dravidanad comprising the areas where Tamil, Telugu, Canarese and Malayalam were spoken.<sup>78</sup> The whole of South India and the Deccan including a portion of Bengal were shown as comprising Dravidanad in this map.<sup>79</sup> The Nationalist and the Anglo Indian press ridiculed the ideas of trifurcating India into "Aryastan", "Dravidastan" and "Pakistan".

Naicker did not base his demand for Dravidanad on any constitutional lines. He proceeded on the assumption that as the leader of

\* Gandhiji spoke in Hindi. Mahadev Desai's English summary of the speech does not mention Vallabhbhai Patel.



the Justice party he would have no difficulty in getting the British concede his demand. But the Madras Government attached little importance to the Justice Party under the captaincy of Naicker. This attitude irked some of the erstwhile Justice leaders who accused the Madras Government of following a vacillating policy. The party was reprimanded by its own organs for its "overloyalty" which made it "cheap and contemptible in the eyes of the British Government".<sup>80</sup> R.K. Shanmukham Chetty, then Dewan of the Cochin State, blamed Governor Hope for ignoring the Justice party which had held the reins of power in the Presidency for sixteen years. He denounced the Government for aligning with the Congress whose real motive was "to break away from the British Commonwealth and establish its own party's dominance in India." Imputing Nazi leanings to the Congress, Chetty stated that as a "patriotic Indian" he was concerned about the safety of India from such a catastrophe. He took the liberty of suggesting to the Governor that Ramaswami Naicker should be invited by the Viceroy to be a member of the War Advisory Council.<sup>81</sup> He wrote a similar letter also to A. Ramaswami Mudaliar who was then member of the Viceroy's Executive Council adding that Mudaliar should impress upon the Viceroy the need for doing everything that would "strengthen the anti-Congress forces in the country".<sup>82</sup>

The Madras Government did not take heed of these activities. Having failed to win its sympathy and co-operation, Naicker sought the help and cooperation of the Muslim League. He hailed the Pakistan concept of Jinnah. In January 1940 he met Jinnah at Bombay. R.K. Shanmukham Chetty had written to Jinnah in advance requesting him to discuss with Naicker, the political condition in the Presidency.<sup>83</sup> When "Pakistan Day" was celebrated at Salem in April 1940, Naicker and his associates participated in it. Later, while addressing the South Arcot Muslim League Conference in September, he supported their demand for "Pakistan".<sup>84</sup>

Both the Justicites and Leaguers were getting indignant at what they regarded as the pro-Congress attitude of the Madras Government. The latter granted one lakh of rupees of the tax-payers' money to the All India Spinners' Association which was a Congress Organisation. The Government also interpreted the Madras City Municipal Act in such a way as to please the Congress Councillors who were in jail for anti-war activities. But what irritated the Justicites most was the Government's proposal to send Congress and pro-Congress journalists at public expense to Singapore to report on the

war situation. These measures of appeasement towards those frustrating the war efforts were construed to be definite indications of the Government's eagerness to use its power and influence to strengthen the hands of the Congress. The Congress would have a walk over in the elections as the Advisers' Government was conducting itself as the "Power-of-attorney agents" of Rajaji. The Government was thus accused of tilting the scales in favour of the Congress long before the General elections.<sup>85</sup> Afflicted with a sense of being wronged by the Government, both the parties adopted an attitude of "benevolent neutrality" in regard to the war effort. They resigned from the War Committee as a protest against the "pro-Congress" gestures of the Madras Government.

It was about this time that Jinnah came to Madras to preside over the Madras session of the Muslim League. His coming had a tonic effect on the protagonists of the Dravidistan theory. They naively believed in the lavish promises held out by Jinnah to accomplish the separation of Dravidanad. Some of the utterances of the President of the All India Muslim League in his Presidential address on 14 April must have shocked even his close associates. Jinnah did not stop with complimenting the Muslim League in south India. He urged the non-Brahmans to secede from the proposed Indian Union. He freely indulged in wanton unprovoked attacks on Brahmans and the Congress. Pledging his fullest sympathy and support to the non-Brahmans of the Presidency, he said "I shall do all I can to help Dravidistan". He even proclaimed Dravidistan as a "third nation".<sup>86</sup>

Referring to Rajaji's proposal to offer Prime Ministership to him, Jinnah said insolently: "All on a sudden that great genius of your Province, C. Rajagopalachari came out, as he does such wonderful things at times with his strategy. . . ." He condemned Rajaji's offer as an attempt at deceiving the Muslim League.

He attempted to rekindle caste animosity by talking of the "skilful manoeuvring" of the electioneering by the Brahmans who constituted only 3 per cent of the Presidency population. Urging the non-Brahmans to extricate themselves from Brahman dominance, he stated: "The only way for you (non-Brahmans) is to come into your own, live your life according to your own culture and according to your language—thank God that Hindi did not go very far here—and your own history is to go ahead with your ideal. . . ." He assured that the Muslims of the South would stretch their hand of friendship to the non-Brahmans and live with them on "lines of equality, justice and fairplay".<sup>87</sup>



On 18 April E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, S. Muthiah Mudaliar and some other non-Brahman leaders met Jinnah privately in the city and conferred with him for over two hours.<sup>88</sup>

It did not behove a man of Jinnah's stature to behave in the manner he did in Madras. How far was the Muslim leader genuinely interested in promoting the well being of the Madras non-Brahmans was anybody's guess. It was an occasion for Jinnah to give vent to his prejudices against the Congress leaders, particularly Rajaji. It was a pity that even a shrewd political and social leader like Ramaswami Naicker was ready to walk into Jinnah's trap.

The only plausible explanation for Jinnah's conduct could be this: Jinnah had lost his composure.

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55. *Ibid.*, First Half of Sep., 1941.
56. M.P. Sivagnanam, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, pp. 407 and 408.
57. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, p. 264.
58. M.P. Sivagnanam, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 406; and Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, p. 266.
59. *The Hindu*, 3 Feb. 1941.
60. *The Mail*, 23 June 1940.
61. *Ibid.*
62. B. Shiva Rao to Sapru, 22 Feb. 1941, *Shiva Rao Papers*.
63. *A Hundred Years of The Hindu*, p. 545.
64. *The Hindu*, 23 July 1941.
65. *Fortnightly Report*: Second Half of July 1941.
66. Gandhiji's interview to *The Hindu*, 24 July 1941.
67. *The Hindu*, 6 Dec. 1941.
68. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, p. 275.
69. Satyamurti to Gandhiji, 27 Aug. 1941, *Satyamurti Papers*.
70. *Ibid.*, Gandhiji to Satyamurti, 1 Sep. 1941.
71. Gandhiji to Satyamurti, 30 Oct. 1941, *CWMG*, Vol. LXXV, p. 27.
72. Delivered on 13 Dec. 1941, cited in M.P. Sivagnanam, *op. cit.*, p. 409.
73. *The Hindu*, 14 Dec. 1941, cited in Rajmohan Gandhi, *op. cit.*, p. 75.



74. *AIVV File* No. 1375, NMM & L.
75. Gandhiji to Azad, 30 Dec. 1941, *CWMG*, Vol. LXXV, pp. 189 & 90.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
77. *Fortnightly Report*: First Half of Oct. 1939.
78. *The Hindu*, 3 June 1940.
79. E. Sa. Visswanathan, *The Political Career of E.V. Ramaswami Naicker*, p. 275.
80. *Sunday Observer*, 20 Apl. 1941.
81. His letter to Hope, 28 Aug. 1940, *R.K. Shanmukham Chetty Papers*.
82. *Ibid.*, Letter to A.R. Mudaliar, 28 Aug. 1940.
83. Letter to Jinnah, 29 Dec. 1939, *R.K. Shanmukham Chetty Papers*.
84. *Fortnightly Report*: Second Half of Sep. 1940.
85. *Sunday Observer*, 20 Apl. 1941.
86. *Indian Express*, 15 Apl. 1941.
87. *Sunday Observer*, 20 Apl. 1941.
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## CHAPTER NINETEEN

# Quit India Movement and After

The beginning of the year 1942 witnessed the Japanese occupation of Singapore, Malaya and the Andaman Islands. Japan overran Burma and the prospect of a Japanese invasion of India became imminent. And Madras was the worst affected. With the fall of Singapore on 15 February, there was a real danger of a naval attack on Madras. The Madras Government was certainly alarmed though its Press note issued on 17 February sought to treat the possibility of a Japanese invasion lightly. It stated: “..... while the Government do not consider the risk so great as to require anyone to leave the city, they think that in order to avoid rush and confusion in the event of an attack, anyone who has no business to keep him in the city and who intends to leave if the danger becomes acute should leave as soon as he conveniently can”.

By the beginning of April the situation took a turn for the worse. The first bombs fell on the Indian soil on the sea board of Madras on 6 April. Japan had bombed Vizagapatam and Cocanada and made air attacks on Ceylon. The city of Madras stood exposed to the danger of an attack. On 12 April the Government ordered the “non-essential population” to leave the metropolis within the next few days. It believed that the danger to Madras from Japan “is now more serious” and announced that persons who had no friends or relatives to whom they could go would be accommodated at Government camps in the suburbs of Madras. The personnel in the essential services stuck to their posts, although, to a superficial observer Madras looked “dead”. Even to the small fraction of the population that remained in Madras food supply was very irregular and inadequate. Scarcity of milk became acute on account of the migration of the milkmen and milch cows. Coupled with the closure of restaurants this caused great hardship to the city dwellers. As The Hindu observed: “The picture presented in residential areas of the city is one of sombre silence. Houses remain locked up most part of the day, the inmates having left. Whole streets remain virtually empty”.<sup>1</sup>



By the fourth week of April, the danger receded owing to change in their plans by the Japanese. The Military also had informed the Madras Governor that it had no definite information of an immediate invasion of South India by Japan.<sup>2</sup> However, Britain had no armies in India to fight the enemy in the event of an invasion. On 24 February many members of the British Parliament voiced their concern about the situation in India. They pleaded for the end of the political deadlock by making a fresh offer to India through the establishment of National Government.

It was exactly now that President Roosevelt of the United States declared in no uncertain terms that the Atlantic Charter\* did apply to all nations. It must be stated that soon after signing the Charter, Churchill made the “blatant declaration” that the Charter had not been meant to apply to India. The visit to India of Chiang Kai Shek who then controlled most of Independent China, in the early months of 1942, also gave an impetus to the Indian demand. The Chinese Generalissimo urged Britain to make a genuine offer to India.

### *Cripps' Mission: Its Failure:*

So the pressure to give India her due came from more than one quarter which was “too heavy even for Churchill”. The result was his announcement on 11 March of the despatch of Cripps' Mission to India. The choice of Stafford Cripps for the mission of conciliation with Indian political leaders was a most welcome one from many perspectives. Cripps enjoyed a prestigious position in British politics and was deeply interested in the Indian question. He was a friend of India, well-wisher of the Congress leaders and above all, a “vegetarian of austere moral rectitude”.

It would be of interest to know that on the eve of Cripps' visit to India, Srinivasa Sastri made a fervent appeal to the various parties, and the Princes and their Ministers who were likely to be consulted by Cripps. Begging them to refrain from embarrassing the British Government by extreme demands, he advocated compromise which was “not only necessary but honourable”. He assured that any modifications suggested by them would be taken

\*In August 1941, the American President Roosevelt and the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill issued their famous Atlantic Charter. Its chief objective was to increase security against war and to work for the advancement of world peace.

into account by Cripps while making his recommendations. "Go ahead. Save the country, save her honour, save her future. Your countrymen will bless your names for ever and the world will venerate you as patriots who forgot their quarrels in the country's dire peril and unitedly won her prosperity as well as her freedom". Many leaders were surprised at this not very encouraging note sounded by Sastri. Cripps' Mission which was ostensibly political was in reality "strategic and military", its chief object being to render India less vulnerable, to save her from falling a prey to Japan. In response to Sastri's call Rajaji pointed out that he had to appeal not to Indian leaders but to British conservatives who had to "place an ideal before the Indian people worth fighting for and dying".<sup>3</sup>

Cripps arrived in New Delhi on 23 March with a set of proposals of the British Cabinet for discussion with the Indian leaders. Cripps' proposals were cleverly designed to please the Congress, the Muslim League and the Indian States at once. It provided for (i) Dominion Status and a Constituent Assembly which aimed at keeping the Congress in good humour; (ii) the right of secession from the Indian union which was an invitation to the Muslim League to form Pakistan; and (iii) the option to join the Indian Union as well as the right to send representatives to the Constituent Assembly which were intended to please the Indian States. It contemplated the establishment of a "political" government at the Centre under the existing constitution for the duration of the war but "defence" would continue to be a British preserve. The proposals aimed at the Balkanisation of India without any real transfer of control over defence.

The Cripps' offer was published on 29 March 1942. It was rejected by the Congress, the Muslim League and many other political bodies, though each for its own reasons. Congress disapproved the offer because it did not concede independence immediately; left defence in the hands of the British Government; and envisaged indirectly the partition of India by granting the provinces the right to secede from the Indian union. The Muslim League had no use for an offer whose fundamental proposals were not open to any modifications. The League also therefore rejected the offer. So did the Hindu Mahasabha, the Ambedkar organisation and the Liberals.

However efforts were being made by some leaders while Cripps was still in India to reach a compromise formula. Rajaji took the



lead in this drive. Rajaji, Cripps and Col. Johnson, Roosevelt's personal envoy, worked out a formula which was agreed to by the Congress Working Committee. It consisted of a demarcation of the functions and authority of the Defence Member and of the Commander-in-chief respectively. On 10 April it looked as if a compromise formula acceptable to all would be reached. But getting suspicious that Cripps in his anxiety to reach an agreement might become over generous, Churchill cautioned Cripps through cable that there should be no compromise on defence. The compromise formula collapsed and on 11 April Cripps announced the failure of his mission.

A top official of the Government of India rightly predicted at the time of Cripps' visit to India that he would go back as a discredited man. The official stated that "Churchill is sending him (Cripps) out not because he has hopes of settlement but because Labour is giving him trouble. Therefore he is being sent out so that after spending a futile month in India he may go back and report to his party that India is hopelessly divided and nothing can be done"<sup>4</sup> Cripps left India stating that the British proposals were withdrawn. Cripps was sincere but helpless.

### *Rajaji under an eclipse: The Madras Resolution :*

It was already seen that about this time, the non-essential population of the city of Madras was ordered to evacuate it consequent upon the threat of Japanese invasion. But the public of Madras strongly felt that the political situation should not be allowed to drift on account of the Japanese menace. The Congress leaders of the Presidency pointed out the need for the party to make common cause with the Muslim League and other minority organisations. A National Government had to be created for the duration of the war "without prejudice to the solution of long-range issues after the war by friendly negotiations and agreement".<sup>5</sup> Rajaji who was thinking along these lines told the new Governor Arthur Hope that if he (Rajaji) returned as the head of a coalition Government, it would be a war Government and therefore no controversial legislation would be introduced. He also said that such a coalition Ministry would include the Justice Party, the Muslim League if Jinnah permitted it, Christians, Scheduled castes and one European. When the Governor asked whether the Congress would permit it, Rajaji replied, "I will be prepared to break away (from

the Congress) and run an independent show down here”<sup>6</sup> — a statement which sparked off a good deal of controversy in the Congress circles.

On 24 April the Madras Legislature Congress Party under Rajaji’s inspiration voiced the general feeling in the Presidency by passing what became known as the “Madras Resolution”. It comprised two parts: one was a recommendation to the AICC to acknowledge the claim of the Muslim League for separation of “Certain areas from a United India” and remove thereby a major obstacle to the “installation of a national Government to meet the present national emergency”;<sup>7</sup> and, the other called for a national front government at the centre and a coalition government in Madras which was being threatened with Japanese invasion and sought the permission of the AICC to invite the Muslim League to participate in it so as to facilitate united and effective action. The crux of the whole issue was that Rajaji wanted the Congress to concede Pakistan if that was the price demanded for the formation of a national Government.

The Madras resolution stirred up a fierce controversy leading ultimately to a split in the Congress organisation in Madras and to a temporary political eclipse of Rajaji. Majority of the Congress leaders differed sharply from Rajaji on the question of *Japanophobia*. According to Rajaji and his associates Japan should be given no quarters. She had not once come to the rescue of India during her national struggle. She had not even extended moral support or propaganda to India such as the people of other countries sometimes gave. Srinivasa Sastri observed: “The circumstances of her (Japan’s) present approach leave no doubt in my mind as to her intentions and no intelligent person can be deceived by her protestations. We must keep her away”.<sup>8</sup> The Congress, on the other hand, viewed Britain and not Japan as India’s immediate aggressor. If the British left India there would be no danger to her from Japan. Because it was Britain who fought Japan and crossed her path.

The Madras resolution of Rajaji had generated a feeling of resentment throughout the Congress circle. It shocked the Members of the Congress High Command. Even Maulana Azad was pained to see that a veteran Congressman like Rajaji had taken such a stand. Since Rajaji’s action amounted to a repudiation of the Congress discipline, he wired to him: “Relations cannot hinder from duty. Please wire explanation. Putting your case before next meeting”.<sup>9</sup> Rajaji’s action embittered the feelings of Gandhiji, Nehru and Patel,



not to speak of many other leaders.<sup>10</sup> Members of the Hindu Maha Sabha waved black flags at Rajaji when he arrived in Allahabad station to attend the meeting of the AICC there. At the AICC session, he faced a storm of opposition from many quarters. When Azad pointed out that Rajaji ought to have consulted his national colleagues before sponsoring the resolution at a Provincial meeting, he expressed regret. He then resigned his membership of the Working Committee in order to move the resolution relating to Pakistan passed by the Madras Legislature party. The other resolution was withdrawn.

In his speech supporting the resolution Rajaji said: "Let us give the Muslims what they have been asking. It is mere shadow. They themselves will say they do not want it, if you do not keep it in your pocket but throw it on the table". "Do all Musalmans want it or is it only the Muslim League?" asked someone. To which, Rajaji pointed out the difficulty in dislodging the League from its position, power and control over the vast masses of Muslims. When Nehru refuted his statement Rajaji challenged him to produce results. If Nehru could bring about a communal settlement, Rajaji said, he would go down on his knees before him. He said "The ghost of Pakistan is not going to kill you. I want to hold it by the beard and face it".<sup>11</sup> Rajaji proved thoroughly wrong. The subsequent activities of Jinnah and his company attested the truth that prophesying in politics was dangerous.

Rajaji's resolution was defeated by an overwhelming majority of 120 votes to 15. But he was the least disheartened by this defeat. Nor did he nurse any ill-feeling towards his opponents. He had the satisfaction of having stirred his audience to think seriously on the Hindu-Muslim issue. That even those who differed from Rajaji appreciated his courage and sincerity was borne out by the fact that his "half an hour's sustained intellectual effort" was received with general applause.<sup>12</sup>

Jawaharlal Nehru was much disenchanted with Rajaji's advocacy of separation. He felt that Rajaji was "breaking to pieces the weapon which Congress had fashioned after 22 years of immeasurable sacrifices. I do not want to say that Rajaji wants to divide the Congress, but the fact is that he no longer commands the support of the Congress".<sup>13</sup>

Following the defeat of his motion, Rajaji gave notice that he would continue to carry on his agitation on the lines suggested in his resolution.<sup>14</sup> He addressed many meetings to bring about a

Congress-League accord. In Tanjore and Madura the audiences included violent disturbers who shouted anti-Pakistan slogans. Unruffled, Rajaji expressed his readiness to face the disturbers of peace even if they came a thousand times stronger. At the end of a meeting at Madura, a missile was hurled at Rajaji. To the shock of many, he jumped into the crowd of hostile demonstrators inviting them to attack him: "Come on, here I am", he said.<sup>15</sup> Addressing a meeting in Salem he said in June 1942 that the Madras Resolution amounted merely to a recognition of the Muslims' right to secede and not to an immediate grant of a separate sovereign state. "We do not divest ourselves of our right to persuade them against separation, but we do not deny them the right to separate if in spite of our persuasion, they wished to go apart".<sup>16</sup>

To the people of the Madras Presidency, Rajaji and Gandhiji were inseparables. To them, the Congress was these two leaders personified. They were, therefore, baffled to find Rajaji expressing views which were at variance with those of Gandhiji and the Congress. The result was thereafter "the great bulk of South's Congressmen gave Rajaji their respect but not their obedience. He was in error in thinking that he could pull Madras away from the course the Mahatma had prescribed".<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, Satyamurti made known to Patel his contention that the members of the Madras Legislature party were bound by pledge to carry out the policy and programme of the Congress. This appealed to Patel who suggested that Rajaji should call another meeting of the Madras Legislature Party and see if the Members were still in agreement with his views.<sup>18</sup> Patel's suggestion annoyed Rajaji because in the prevailing situation the members of the Legislature party might not feel free to give any contrary opinion. Rajaji wrote that "between the lines, I must read in your suggestion the idea that you support Satyamurti's public statement to the effect that because the AICC rejected my proposal and I still hold my view and press it on the public, I should resign my leadership of the Congress Legislature party . . . . . While I am ready to resign this and any other place as you desire, I do not feel that the demand is justifiable".<sup>19</sup>

Rajaji's words pained Patel so much that he replied: "I wish I had not lived to see the day when circumstances conspired to place us in such opposite camps. Every sentence that you utter in public hurts us like a stab in the heart. . . . . ." Referring to the pugnacious utterances of Rajaji's associates, Patel wrote: "He



(K. Santanam) ridicules non-violence, constructive programme and everything that we stood for, for so many years in a manner in which even our worst enemy has not done. . . . . After all, he reflects your opinions and his loyalty to you has made him so fanatic as to forget ordinary limits of decency. . . . . The course you have adopted is harmful and is likely to produce contrary results".<sup>20</sup>

Satyamurti as Secretary of the TNCC wrote to the AICC about Rajaji's hostile propaganda. But the AICC replied that the local Committee itself was competent to take action against him. Accordingly on 8 July 1942 Kamaraj Nadar, President of the TNCC, issued a show-cause notice to Rajaji asking him to explain within 15 days why disciplinary action should not be taken against him for his propaganda against the resolutions of the Congress party and advocacy of partition of India.<sup>21</sup> Actually Kamaraj sent his letter in Tamil to Rajaji on 5 July. Under that letter, Rajaji noted "Please publish this letter in *The Hindu*, properly translated".<sup>22</sup> On 9 July, Rajaji conveyed to the President of the TNCC his decision to resign from the Congress. He stated that he wanted to be absolutely free to pursue his campaign to persuade the Congress to pass a resolution adopting the motion of the Madras Legislature partly regarding the Muslim League's demand.

Since the life of the Provincial Legislature had been extended by a gazette notification, Rajaji convened a meeting of the Legislature party on 15 July. It passed a vote of censure on Rajaji for his anti-Congress propaganda. By an overwhelming majority, the meeting rescinded the previous pro-Pakistan resolution and confirmed the resolutions of the AICC. The strength of Gandhiji's power was thus proved once again. Rajaji resigned his membership of the Legislative Assembly also so as to enable the Legislature party to elect a new leader.<sup>23</sup> Only seven of his colleagues followed him into exile. All that Rajaji wanted was immunity from "vexatious hardships" which the TNCC sought to impose on him and others of his line of thinking. He continued to do this propaganda against the Congress stand, criticised the Congress' attitude towards Cripps' proposals and advocated office-acceptance in the Provinces for what it was worth even though power was not given in the centre.<sup>24</sup>

Although Gandhiji also had resigned his membership of the Congress, no comparison could be drawn between the two cases. Such was Gandhiji's influence with the masses that even after he ceased to be a member of the Congress its hierarchy continued to look upon him as the "*de facto* if not the *de jure* leader of the party".

Against his towering personality “not even Jawaharlal Nehru could prevail”.<sup>25</sup> That being the case, Rajaji had slender chance of making his weight felt.

The issue of the show cause notice leading to the resignation of Rajaji was an unpleasant episode in the history of both the Presidency and India. True, Rajaji’s action could not be easily explained away. The Madras resolution and the earlier assurance he gave to Governor Hope that he would break away from the Congress and form a Government in Madras amounted to a betrayal of the Congress of which he was a powerful member. He was guilty of “great disservice” to the nation for his pronouncement only added to the conceit of Jinnah who was elevated to the status of “an arbiter of India’s destinies”.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, there were some among the *intelligentsia* who would not easily believe that Rajaji could be guilty of a “breach of discipline”. Gandhiji himself had said on more than one occasion that even his worst enemy would not accuse Rajaji of any selfish motive. After all he made his pronouncement on Pakistan from altruistic motives about Hindu-Muslim unity. The anxiety to ward off the Japanese intrusion also could not be dismissed as insignificant. As Rajaji had said: “the two issues were intertwined”.<sup>27</sup> Supporters of Rajaji’s views therefore found it difficult to reconcile themselves to the fact that a democratic organisation like the Congress could suppress expression of even legitimate difference of opinion in the name of discipline. *The Hindu* warned that the Congress would become denuded of the services of men of great stature like Rajaji to whose efforts it owed its supremacy, if its executive persisted in acting in the manner it did in his case.<sup>28</sup>

It was a pity that after all the commotion, the Muslim League did not respond to Rajaji’s appeal. Rajaji was thereupon advised by his close friends to frame an independent policy without reference to the Congress or the League and to popularise it in spite of “unpopularity”. K. Santanam wrote: “Any kind of propaganda will help to restore the people’s morale which is sinking between mob hooliganism and police terrorism”.<sup>29</sup>

### *The Resolution of 8 August :*

Rajaji’s hope that the Presidency could be drawn away from the course set up by Gandhiji was not realised. Gandhiji’s hold on the masses of the Presidency remained as strong as ever. His next



ultimatum to the British to “Quit India” met with an equally overwhelming response in the Presidency. The British had been suffering defeats at the hands of Japan right from Singapore, through Burma and in July 1942, Japan was at the gates of India. There was a strong feeling that British, who lacked material on the Indian front, might quit India leaving her in the lurch at a critical hour, as they had done in Burma and Singapore. Gandhiji therefore wanted Britain to vacate India and retreat into her own borders because she had the resources to defend herself there. Although Japan was indisputably an aggressor, Gandhiji deemed Britain a worse aggressor. If Britain vacated India, he held, danger to her would be far less. India should be able to come to terms with Japan who had no enmity towards her. Even if Japan attacked her, Gandhiji felt free India would deal with Japan effectively. This constituted the fundamental difference between him and Rajaji. To Rajaji, Japan was the immediate aggressor of the two and Britain could be tackled later. To Gandhiji, “an exploiter of other nations was an exploiter, whether he be an imperialist or totalitarian”.<sup>30</sup>

Gandhiji was certainly not anti-British or anti-Chinese as opponents of his view made him out to be. As Louis Fischer\* rightly assessed, Gandhiji was “pro-British . . . pro-Chinese . . . pro-American. He wants us to win the war. But he does not think we can win it unless we enlist support of Indians by purifying our war aims”.<sup>31</sup> Fischer took great pains to convince the Viceroy that Gandhiji was far from being intransigent and that he never wanted riots and disturbances. He wanted the Viceroy to negotiate with Gandhiji. But the former did not respond to this suggestion properly.<sup>32</sup> Since the British did not listen to Gandhiji’s advice and quit India, he had to force them to go, either by non-co-operation or by civil disobedience or by both. But he made it abundantly clear that the Movement was to drive the British and not to invite the Japanese who were no liberators. Gandhiji was firm that Britain should quit India. If she did so, all the parties would come together and “devise a home made solution for the Government of India. It may not be of any western pattern; but it will be durable”.<sup>33</sup>

Gandhiji made it clear that withdrawal of the British did not

\*American journalist who interviewed Gandhiji at Sevagram daily for one week from 4 June 1942. He took a message from Gandhiji to Viceroy Linlithgow. Gandhiji also entrusted him with a letter to Roosevelt.

mean the physical removal of all Englishmen from India but that it only meant the transfer of political power to Indian hands. Those who had made India their home were most welcome to remain in the country and live as equals with other Indian citizens. The Movement would take in all men who called themselves Indians. It would also include all items of non-violent resistance already sanctioned by the Congress. There might be anarchy after the transfer of power if the different parties competed with one another to establish their authority. But that was unavoidable in a great struggle for freedom.

On 14 July the Working Committee which met at Wardha passed the resolution already drafted by Gandhiji and authorised him to take charge of the Movement and lead it if Britain failed to respond to his appeal to withdraw.<sup>34</sup> In the 1700 worded resolution, the Committee called for the withdrawal of Britain from India failing which the Congress would resort to mass action under Gandhiji's leadership. It was a mildly-worded resolution and a friendly request to withdraw. *The Hindu* urged the British in vain to take the hand of friendship and accept the Congress offer.

This idea of "Quit India" occurred to Gandhiji after Cripps' departure. "It was during my Monday of silence that the idea was born in me", said he to Louis Fischer when the latter was curious to know about the origin of the Movement.<sup>35</sup> There was also an "additional reason" to his cry of "Quit India". A confidential circular of Frederick Puckle\* happened to fall into the hands of Gandhiji.<sup>36</sup> This secret document was issued on 17 July i.e., three days after the Working Committee had adopted the resolution at Wardha asking the British to quit. This secret document addressed to the Chief Secretaries of all local Governments was intended to mobilise anti-Congress elements to crush the National Movement. Puckle described the Congress Manifesto as a manifesto of the party and not of India. Among the three suggestions he had made in the secret document for printing cartoons and posters, one showed Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo each with a Microphone saying: "I vote for the Congress resolution".<sup>37</sup> But the intelligence found no link between the Congress and the Axis agents. In a secret note written two months later, these lines occur: "There is no evidence to prove that there is collusion between the Congressmen and the Axis powers in connection with the recent disturbances".<sup>38</sup>

\*Director General of Information, Govt. of India.



After the Wardha meet, leaders were commissioned to circulate the instructions of the Working Committee regarding the new campaign. Pattabhi Sitaramayya was entrusted with this task where the Presidency of Madras was concerned. He went to Masulipatam first where the work was taken up by Kala Venkata Rao and then proceeded to Madras to outline the programme to leading Congressmen in Madras. Copies of the circular which became famous as the Andhra Circular were issued by Venkata Rao. Since none bore any signature, the intelligence sources wrote that the Working Committee had "for a number of years never entrusted its close secret to the post and like the Communists has always communicated them through couriers".<sup>39</sup>

The Quit India Movement fashioned by Gandhiji in May-June 1942 and put into shape by the Working Committee by its Wardha resolution of 14 July was launched by the AICC by its famous resolution of 8 August adopted at Bombay. On the eve of this meeting of the AICC the Government sent for publication in *The Hindu*, a *communiqué* giving currency to some documents seized from the AICC. This was done deliberately to discredit the Congress. The documents unearthed by the Government were no secret ones. There was no secrecy about any document of the Congress. All its statements or sentiments had been expressed publicly at some time or other. *The Hindu* therefore declined to publish it as it would be wrong "to give this absurd stunt the wider publicity the Government seeks. . . . ."<sup>40</sup>

The resolution of 8 August demanded the immediate withdrawal of Britain from India; the setting up of a provisional government representing all the parties; the pooling of all resources for fighting the struggle for freedom against the aggression of Nazism, Fascism and Imperialism, and thereby strengthening the cause of the United Nations; and the establishment of a world federation of free nations after the termination of the war. To achieve the very first objective, namely, the immediate withdrawal of Britain, the Working Committee sanctioned a nation-wide non-violent mass movement under the leadership of Gandhiji. In his stirring message to the nation on the morning of 9 August, Gandhiji exhorted the satyagrahis to seek and face death as only then the nation would survive. He said *Karenge Ya marenge* (We will do or die).<sup>41</sup> The same morning the Government committed the "colossal blunder" of arresting Gandhiji and other members of the Working Committee and many other prominent Congress leaders. It was disclosed

later in November 1942, that just before the arrest and detention of Gandhiji and other leaders, the Indian Government received a message from London, recommending their deportation to East Africa. But the Indian members of the Viceroy's Executive Council opposed this move. Ultimately the Government agreed on a compromise that they might be denied all access to the outside world from their place of detention.<sup>42</sup> The detenus were all taken to an unknown destination. The Congress was declared an unlawful body and Congressmen all over India indiscriminately arrested.

### *Violent Mass Upsurge:*

These arrests were a signal for the outbreak of uprisings everywhere in the Presidency as elsewhere in India, in which violence was freely intermingled with non-violence paralysing the administration. The Government accused the Congress of indecision. It was pointed out that within hours of its own statement that it might not embark on any big campaign, the Congress had announced its decision to resort to action on the lines of the Non-co-operation Movement of the 1920s. "This is playing with fire", warned *The Mail*.<sup>43</sup> The authorities refused to accept that the situation had abruptly taken a different turn with their arrest of leaders.

There were mutual recriminations—the Government holding the Congress responsible for the outbreak of violence everywhere and the latter disowning its responsibility for what had happened after the arrest of its leaders. The Congress charged the Government with having precipitated a grave crisis by incarcerating all its leaders. Unfortunately, the Government failed to realise that jailing the Congress leaders had not paid in the past and that it would not certainly pay in the future.

The situation in the Presidency was much worse than elsewhere. Rajaji had resigned from the Congress on the issue of Pakistan and other leaders who would have had a restraining influence on the people had been incarcerated. College students abstained from classes immediately after the Movement was launched. In Loyola and Pachaiyappa's Colleges, students threw stones at Police and there was a lathi charge to disperse them.<sup>44</sup> Throughout the Movement in the Presidency, the students of Loyola, Christian and Engineering Colleges figured prominently in staging demonstrations and obstructing electric trains braving lathi charges and whipping and courting imprisonments. On 12 August the students



of the Presidency College held a meeting which was addressed by Mohan Kumaramangalam. He urged them to call off the strike but failed. The meeting passed a resolution to continue the strike. There were also resolutions protesting against the arrest of Gandhiji and other Congress leaders and condemning the lathi-charge on students. These happenings necessitated the visit of S.V. Ramamurti of the Indian Civil Service and Adviser to Governor to the Presidency College on 13 August. This was followed by the issue of a certificate under the Camps and Parades Control Order intended to curb the activities of the Students' Congress. According to this Order, permission had to be obtained from the District Magistrate or the Commissioner of Police before any training camps were held for the student volunteers.<sup>45</sup>

The Director of Public Instruction issued a circular asking heads of educational institutions to report to him the daily attendance class-wise until normal attendance was restored and also any demonstration by students in their institutions.<sup>46</sup> In the Annamalai University, students hailing from various linguistic regions conducted protest meetings against Gandhiji's arrest and delivered fiery speeches in their respective mother tongues. They hoisted the National Flag. When they were about to take a procession, they were prevailed over by their Vice Chancellor K.V. Reddy Naidu who threatened to take action against the demonstrators under the Government *Communique* on Students' Strike issued in November 1940.<sup>47</sup> Women students also came out during this Quit India Movement to protest against the British imperialism. Students of the Queen Mary's College observed *hartals* and led processions shouting "Quit India" slogans all along the way until they were dispersed by the police.

Hundreds of labourers from the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills and the Public Workshops struck work. A large number of labourers of the Madras Port Trust, Madras Electric Tramway and Madras Corporation carried on labour agitation. There was also picketing of toddy shops in certain parts of the city and the toddy shop in Choolai was set on fire. Several Post boxes were burnt and some attempts at incendiarism were made in the High Court buildings and a bomb was thrown in the Muthialpet (Madras) Police Station.<sup>48</sup>

The situation was even worse in the districts. Protest meetings were organised in the districts of Kumbakonam, South Arcot, North Arcot, Trichinopoly, Bapatla, Ellore, Nandyal, Anantapur,

Calicut, Palghat and Quilon.<sup>49</sup> In Malabar, a bomb was placed under a culvert but it was discovered and defused in time. Railway Stations at Tenali, Duggirala, Chirala and Nidabrolu were burnt down by rioters and rails were removed in many places.<sup>50</sup> *Hartals*, demonstrations and processions shouting anti-Government slogans, cutting off telegraph and telephone wires to disrupt communications and setting fire to police stations and police vehicles were resorted to in the districts of North Arcot, Chingleput, Coimbatore, Madura, Ramnad and Tinnevely. In Coimbatore, there were large scale strikes organised in a number of mills; an ammunition train from Cochin consisting of two engines and forty four wagons was derailed between Podanur and Singanallur railway stations; and at Sullur aerodrome all the sheds and the motor vehicles stationed therein were burnt. Madura became the storm centre of the Movement necessitating the deployment of both the police and the army. Roads were barricaded in many parts of this district and Government servants assaulted. A mass meeting got up in defiance of prohibitory orders resulted in police firing in which some were killed and many injured. In Ramnad district, at Rajapalayam, karaikkudi, Tiruvadanai and Poolankurichi, there were many cases of arson and incendiarism.<sup>51</sup> In Tanjore district, people turned violent in places like Tiruvaiyar, Tanjore, Mannargudi and Kumbakonam. There were therefore many arrests in these places. At Nachiarkoil, an attempt was made to blow up a bridge. At Tiruthuraiipoondi an attempt was made to derail a train. In Tinnevely, the Salt Factory at Kulasekharapatnam was attacked by a crowd carrying lethal weapons. In Trichinopoly, students played an active role picketing schools, colleges and courts and organising meetings and *hartals*. A violent mob derailed a passenger train between Pugalur and Noyyal railway stations and a goods train near Trichinopoly. The mob also removed fish-plates from the railway line between Lalgudi and Valadi stations. It was only in Salem district, that the mob did not turn very violent.<sup>52</sup>

This last fight for *Swaraj* was different from all the previous Gandhian Movements in three respects: (1) this was the first Movement which directly asked the British to "Quit India"; (2) it surpassed the earlier campaigns in dimensions and intensity; and (3) though designed and launched by Gandhiji, it went off the track of *ahimsa*, as the Nationalists themselves were convinced that radical and revolutionary methods were inevitable to reach the goal of *Swaraj*.



*Ruthless Repression:*

The Tamil Nad, Andhra and Kerala Congress Committees were all declared unlawful associations by the Madras Government as the object of all had been “interference with the maintenance of law and order” which constituted a menace to public peace.<sup>53</sup> Censorship was imposed on the Press which included restrictions on reports of the Congress Movement and the counter measures to quell it. The Government came down so heavily on some of the leading newspapers and journals—both English and Vernacular—that even *The Mail*, of all the papers, advised the Government to treat the Indian Press with courtesy and consideration. It repeated the words of advice offered by the *Daily Express* to the British Government:

Don't quarrel with the newspapers  
Don't pursue a vendetta against them  
Make use of this great arm of democracy  
For purpose of sustaining, guiding,  
Strengthening and fortifying the struggle  
Make friends with journalists.  
They are important to you use them  
Do not embitter or embarrass them.<sup>54</sup>

But the Government paid the least heed to it. It imposed a ban on even non-violent activities such as *hartals*, meetings, processions and demonstrations. As a result, a popular resentment with a “virulence hitherto unknown in the political annals of Madras,” broke out. People indulged in all acts of vandalism and courted arrest in large numbers.

Satyamurti was arrested on the night of 11 August under the Defence of India Rules at the Arkonam junction on his way back to Madras from Bombay after attending the AICC meeting.<sup>55</sup> He was first taken to the Vellore jail but was soon transferred to Amraoti jail. He was driven 90 miles from Nagpur to Amraoti in a rickety bus without any supply of drinking water throughout the journey. Within three months after reaching Amraoti, his condition became so serious that his seventeen year old daughter Lakshmi who was with him wrote to her relatives in Madras about her father's condition. When her letter was shown to G.A. Natesan, he was so moved that he forwarded it to Governor Hope stating that while Satyamurti's politics was not his, he had no doubt in mind that Satyamurti would be the last person to be a party to any

subversive activity. In about a month, Satyamurti was brought back to Madras and was admitted in the General Hospital on 10 January 1943.<sup>56</sup> He died on 28 March while still a prisoner.

On 13 August 1942 M.P. Sivagnanam, Secretary, Madras District Congress Committee, was arrested at Royapuram. Other prominent Congressmen who were arrested on the 13 and 14 August were Kala Venkata Rao, T. Prakasam, Nageswara Arya and Kamala Devi Arya. Kamaraj Nadar was arrested on 16 August at Virudunagar.<sup>57</sup> V.V. Giri was arrested at Madras on 17 August.<sup>58</sup>

Two forms of punishment were meted out uniformly by the Government to all the districts which indulged in violence. One was the imposition of collective fines on those villages in each district which organised the Quit India Movement; and the other, the suspension of all local councils which supported the Movement for six months. Collective fines amounting to Rs.6,535, Rs.5,000, Rs.35,410, Rs.2,93,428 and Rs.38,718 were collected respectively from North Arcot, Chingleput, Coimbatore, Ramnad and Tanjore.<sup>59</sup>

There could be no condonation of the violence indulged in by the mob. The Nationalist papers in the Presidency condemned the mob excesses in no uncertain terms. *The Hindu*, while denouncing the policy of the Government, warned the people against the grave consequences of indulging in collective violence. The paper characterised the mob outbursts as “degrading and pointless”.<sup>60</sup> Rajaji said the wave of lawlessness displayed by the mob was far from helping Gandhiji in his plans. Those responsible for such dastardly acts were “deluding themselves, bringing discredit on him (Gandhiji), impeding the progress of the Congress and postponing the day of India’s salvation”, he said.<sup>61</sup>

The Government for her part did nothing to release the Congress leaders from jails. Such an act would have definitely appeased the public. The leaders would have been able to contain the Movement within the limits of non-violence. But the Government showed no signs of coming to terms with India. On the contrary, it was busy administering heavier doses of repression to quell the Quit India Movement. It did not realise that the National Movement had reached a stage when it badly needed a gesture of goodwill on the part of Britain. “A declaration of India’s independence coupled with what Bertrand Russel compendiously calls ‘immediate civil independence’ during the war”, said T.R. Venkatarama Sastri, former President, National Liberal Federation, “could be framed



without any prejudice to the prosecution of the war. If the future of India was guaranteed, Britain would secure the positive co-operation of the whole of India".<sup>62</sup> But Britain was least inclined to do anything that might promote mutual goodwill between the two countries.

Equally adamant was Jinnah. He paid scant regard to Rajaji's fresh attempt to bring about a *rapprochement* between the Congress and the Muslim League. Rajaji appealed to Jinnah in Bombay, on the eve of the meeting of the Working Committee of the Muslim League, to find a solution to end the *impasse*. Pointing out that not only the Congress but the Muslim League also was in danger, Rajaji said: "The Congress is in prison, with a feeling perhaps that it has done all it could. But the responsibility of the League, which is not in prison, is, for that reason, all the greater".<sup>63</sup> The response from Jinnah to this appeal from Rajaji was far from encouraging.

The stubborn attitude of the British to appeals of leaders like Rajaji gave an impetus to the Movement in the Presidency. The Government was going all out to meet the intransigence of the agitators. By the beginning of September 1942, the Madras Government became ruthless in suppressing the movement. A *communiqué* of 2 September 1942 forced students to call off strikes. They were warned that disciplinary action would be taken against them if they continued to absent themselves from schools and colleges. Some College students vacated their hostels in protest against the ban on the flying of national flags in the hostels. The students of the Annamalai University continued their strike. The illness of its Vice-Chancellor Reddy Naidu deprived the university of its controlling authority at a critical period.<sup>64</sup>

On 30 September 1942, a Bill was passed in the British Parliament providing for the continuance of the existing temporary administrative arrangements in Madras and the other five Provinces for the duration of the war and for twelve months thereafter. This meant that so long as the War lasted the Presidency would be deprived of "a most necessary safety valve" and would be ruled autocratically by the Governor assisted by his Advisers. "Autocratic Government whatever its advantages, is an anachronism. In India, where it is so largely bureaucratic, it is undesirable" wrote even the pro-British *Mail*.<sup>65</sup>

Pre-censorship and restrictions were imposed on the Press. The All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference which met on

5 October 1942 under the lead of K. Srinivasan urged the repeal of the restriction imposed on the press. The conference endorsed Srinivasan's formula of withdrawal of all restrictions on an assurance of self-restraint by Editors. A resolution was passed urging freedom to publish news without precensorship. The editors were advised to exercise restraint in presenting news on disturbances and also to avoid publication of news conducive to illegal or subversive activities. The Government appropriately responded by withdrawing the rigorous restrictions imposed earlier on newspapers. Papers which were forced to close down, resumed publication.<sup>66</sup> But this was not the end of the battle between the Government and the Nationalist Press. The Madras Press Advisory Committee had to meet on 30 October 1942 to request the Government to withdraw the warning issued to the Editor of *The Hindu* and the order requiring security from the most popular Tamil weekly *Ananda Vikatan*. But the Government declined to comply with the requests.<sup>67</sup>

Amidst this confusion, came like a bombshell the news on 10 February 1943 that Gandhiji would go on a twenty one-day fast from that date and that he had already commenced it. It was conceived as an "appeal to the highest Tribunal for justice". It was provoked by the Viceroy's firm refusal to listen to any suggestion and repeated insistence on the prior repudiation of the AICC resolution of 8 August 1942.<sup>68</sup> Gandhiji considered this attitude of the Viceroy "an invitation to fast".<sup>69</sup> News about the fast excited public interest in the Presidency. The agitation aroused by it reached its peak on 20 and 21 February 1943, when many Colleges had poor strength. Students staged demonstrations in front of the Secretariat buildings and in the Chief Presidency Magistrate's court. The Annamalai University remained closed following a students' meeting. In Madanapalli when students refused to disperse, lathi charge was ordered. In a strongly worded leader, the Tamil daily *Dinamani* demanded the removal of Viceroy Linlithgow. The paper described the extension of his term of office beyond five years as a "first class stupidity". The general cry was that it was not enough if Gandhiji was released but that Linlithgow must be shipped off immediately.<sup>70</sup>

Two prominent women who came forward at this time to organise strikes were Ammu Swaminathan and Manjubhashini.\* Both the

\*Well-known social workers and freedom fighters of Madras.



ladies were arrested and detained under Rule 20 of the Defence of India Rules.<sup>71</sup>

Gandhiji rejected the Government's offer to release him during the period of the fast. Many leaders of all shades of opinion from the Presidency including Rajaji pointed to the Government that if Gandhiji should die, the task of reconciliation between the two nations would become next to impossible. But the Government did not seem to realise the implications of the warning.<sup>72</sup> In fact the officialdom pooh-poohed the fast as a ruse for release. Wrote Viceroy Linlithgow to Gandhiji: "I regard the use of a fast for political purpose as a form of political blackmail (*himsa*) for which there can be no moral justification".<sup>73</sup> Dunlop ICS, Madras stated that it was a "grave abuse (of a rite) which Gandhi with a characteristically crooked twist, has borrowed from Hindu mythology".<sup>74</sup>

Miraculously Gandhiji survived his fast which he broke on 3 March 1943.

Considering his weak health, the British officials felt certain that Gandhiji would not survive the fast. Anticipating his end during the fast they made arrangements, no doubt with the full approval of the Viceroy, for the cremation of Gandhiji in the detention camp in Poona.<sup>75</sup> The most disappointed person at Gandhiji's survival was Churchill. Viceroy Wavell thus records in his Diary: "Winston sent me a peevish telegram to ask why Gandhi had not died as yet!"<sup>76</sup>

### *Jinnah's Perfidy*

It is necessary here to have a glimpse of the activities of the other two parties in the Presidency—the Justice and the Communist parties—during this period from 1942 to 45. It was seen in the last chapter how the Justice party under Ramaswami Naicker's lead hobnobbed with Jinnah in order to secure the League's support for his demand for Dravidastan. Naicker reposed immense faith in Jinnah's promise to plead for Dravidastan along with his own demand for Pakistan. But Jinnah hardly ever remembered his promise once he left Madras. In the meantime, Naicker had to face stiff opposition in the party itself. Many Justicites who were disenchanted with his leadership accused Naicker of using the party to serve his own personal ends. When Viswanathan, the party's General Secretary and one of the chief opponents of Naicker

resigned in June 1942, Naicker offered the coveted position to C.N. Annadurai, his trusted lieutenant. Annadurai was not unaware of Naicker's limitations as a political leader. Still, he supported his leadership because he understood that Naicker being the only leader, who enjoyed the support of the masses, was indispensable for the party. Annadurai was anxious to retain Naicker's lead as otherwise the masses would rally behind the Congress. An attractive orator that he was, Annadurai did well in canvassing for Naicker's leadership.

Annadurai was much distressed over the unconcerned attitude adopted by the Madras Government towards the Justice party. The Government did not acknowledge or recognise the co-operation willingly extended by the Justice party in its war efforts. Annadurai felt keenly the need for a radical change in the relationship of the old guard of the Justicites with the British. He urged the old guard to give up its pro-British policy and renounce the titles and honours conferred on them by the British before 31 March 1945. He drafted a resolution to this effect called the "Annadurai Resolution" which also stated that the Justice party would thereafter be called the *Dravida Kazhagam* ("Dravidian Federation"). On its approval by Naicker, the resolution was published in the *Kudi Arasu* of 5 August 1944. This enraged the old guard of the Justice party as the objectives of the new party were at variance with those of their own party. But the old guard was in a minority. When the resolution was debated at the subsequent Justice party confederation, there was pandemonium. The unruly behaviour of Naicker's men who had gathered in large numbers "successfully silenced the opposition". The resolution was carried with a "dubious majority".<sup>77</sup> The dissidents met separately and voted for the continuance of the Justice party. Naicker was expelled from the party which however became moribund.

On the eve of Gandhiji's negotiations with Jinnah in August 1944 on the "Rajaji Formula",\* Naicker addressed a letter to Jinnah. It was intended to remind Jinnah of Naicker's claim for Dravidastan to which the former had pledged his support in his presidential address at the Muslim League Conference of April 1941 at Madras. Naicker wrote:

\*The formula which formed the basis for terms of settlement between the Congress and the League provided among other things for a plebiscite of the inhabitants in the Muslim majority areas in North West and East of India to decide the issue of separation.



“I have been watching carefully the proceedings of Mr. Rajagopalachari’s formula towards solving the deadlock and your desire to receive Mr. Gandhi at your residence in Bombay in the middle of August . . . . . I need not say that Congressites are experts in twisting words and to give occult sense. They can say anything and give meaning in whatever manner they think. Though we do not depend upon them you know very well that we should be vigilant and careful in the negotiation. It is clear that a general election with Hindus and Muslims as well as Aryans and Dravidians will give hardship to both of us. Kindly excuse me for reminding you about our discussions relating to Pakistan and Dravidistan while we were at Madras and Delhi and your assurances that you would plead for both questions as one. Here in South India I have considered both the questions as one and done my best to solve the problem as far as possible. Yourself know very well that there could be no Pakistan and independence of Muslim India until and unless independence was achieved for the rest of the nation”.<sup>78</sup>

Jinnah replied to him on 17 August 1944 :

“I have always had much sympathy for the people of Madras 90 percent of whom are non-Brahmans\* and if they desire to establish their Dravidistan it is entirely for your people to decide on this matter. I can say no more and certainly I cannot speak on your behalf . . . . . but hitherto I have noticed that in your activities you have been undecisive (sic). If the people of your Province really desire Dravidistan then it is for them to assert themselves. I hope you will understand my position that I can speak only for Muslim India but you have my assurance that whenever and wherever I have a say in the matter you will find me supporting any just and fair claim or demand of any section of the people of India and particularly the non-Brahmans of Southern India”.<sup>79</sup>

Jinnah’s reply naturally upset Naicker. It also placed him in an embarrassing situation as this correspondence was released in September when Naicker was expelled from the Justice party consequent upon his formation of the *Dravida Kazhagam*. Naicker, however, did not lose heart. He maintained that only the party led by him should be regarded as the Justice party although its nomenclature had been changed. He also stated its primary objective was to agitate for a separate Dravidistan. Surprisingly, even Annadurai known for his sober thinking, vigorously advocated

\*Obviously Jinnah had reckoned all but Brahmans and Muslims of the Presidency to be non-Brahmans.

secession. The protagonists of separation of Dravidanad from India had considered the issue very superficially. They had lost sight of the complex issue of defence and the still more complicated problem of an independent Dravidanand's relations with other countries including the rest of India. Some dismissed the *Kazhagam's* demand as a forum of "midsummer madness". Others proclaimed it as a "political stunt to win back for Naicker his lost popularity".<sup>80</sup>

The Communist party was also very active in the Presidency during this period. Its leaders Mohan Kumaramangalam, P. Ramamurti, M.R. Venkataraman and Anandan Nambiar found this hour the most propitious for their propaganda. In July 1944 the ban on the Communist party was lifted and all its members were released by the British Government. It was done in the hope that the party would extend its co-operation with the Government in its war efforts since Russia, the home of Communism, had become a British ally. The Communists reciprocated the gesture by whole-heartedly co-operating with the Government in its war efforts. At a meeting convened by the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway Employees' Union on 24 July 1944 in Perambur, Mohan Kumaramangalam said that the Communist party represented the most progressive section of the Indian people; though the attitude of the British towards it had hitherto been hostile, it was the duty of every citizen to actively co-operate in the war. He also said that if Japan conquered India, only the latter and not British Imperialism would suffer and that the National Movement would be "smashed". He appealed to his audience to join the army in large numbers.<sup>81</sup> Kumaramangalam also pleaded with the Government for the release of the Congress leaders. In fact the Madras Communists criticised the Government's refusal to permit Rajaji to interview Gandhiji which they said indicated the Government's real attitude towards Indian unity. The Communists also came out whole-heartedly in favour of the Rajaji formula and got Rajaji address a meeting of the Communist-controlled Muslim Students' Organisation in the city.<sup>82</sup> Jinnah's cavalier attitude disillusioned them.

All the same, the Communists did not lose time in strengthening their hold upon the workers and others. The released Communists at Coimbatore stated that their object was not to help the British Government but to prevent Japanese aggression, abolish capitalism and build up a "Soviet India". They carried on extensive underground propaganda in order to bring students, mill and



factory workers and *Kisans* from the Congress into their fold. They formed "Students' cells", "Madar Sangams", and "Workers' and *Kisans*' Unions". In some districts, they instigated the *kisans* to make exorbitant wage demands, stop all cultivation and go on a strike if these were not conceded.<sup>83</sup>

On account of this mobilisation, the Communists often clashed with the Congress. The latter made every endeavour to keep the Communists away from its meetings. They were excluded from the Congress *Sangam* which was formed in Madras in October 1944 with a view to securing the release of the detenus and others who subscribed to the Quit India Resolution of the AICC. The formation of the *Sangam* was the first step to oust the Communist elements from all Congress activities. At the conference of the Tamil Nad Congress Workers at Ariyalur (Trichinopoly) in December 1944 presided over by S.K. Patil, President of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee, it was decided among other things, to exclude Communists from the Congress.<sup>84</sup> In Malabar where there had always been a strife between the two parties, Congressmen devised ways and means of shutting out the Communists altogether from any participation in Congress activities.<sup>85</sup>

The Communist leaders were unhappy over what they felt to be an unkindly attitude of the Congress towards them. They persisted in their efforts to persuade the Congress to take them into its fold. P. Sundararama Reddy, a well-known Communist leader of the Andhra region, addressed meetings in Anantapur, Kurnool and other places to reinforce the Communists' plea to admit them into Congress ranks. But the Congress leaders did not budge. They knew that if the Communists gained entry into Congress, they would virtually control it and use it for their own ends. They condemned the path followed by the Indian Communists who wanted communism of Stalin's type in India.

In December 1945 the Communists among the lower ranks of the Congress were expelled from the party and the Communist members of the AICC faced an enquiry for indiscipline. The Congress Working Committee took disciplinary action against them and their names were removed off the AICC list. The Working Committee also recommended to the subordinate Congress Committees to adopt similar measures in the Provinces and purge the Communists from the Congress organisation for their anti-national activities during the 1942 struggle.<sup>86</sup>

Difference of opinion was strongly marked in the ranks of

Provincial Congress over the "Rajaji Formula" which was intended to serve as a basis for a *rapprochement* between the Congress and the Muslim League. Many Congress papers which originally opposed the formula lent support to it after Gandhiji officially approved it in 1943 during his fast.<sup>87</sup> It was communicated to Jinnah in April 1944 and was published in July. In Nellore, T.T. Krishnamachari of the Central Assembly spoke in favour of it. Labour Organisations canvassed support for it.<sup>88</sup> The Madras Labour Union passed a resolution at a meeting on 15 August praying for the successful outcome of the Gandhi-Jinnah meeting.<sup>89</sup> A similar resolution was passed by the Andhra Rashtriya Municipal Workers' and Employees' Union sponsored by the Communists.<sup>90</sup> Those who supported the Formula were keen that Rajaji should return to the Congress and resume his leadership in the Presidency. Even resolutions were passed to this effect. Those opposed to the formula stood for the implementation of the Quit India Resolution. Following the inauguration of the Congress *Sangam* in October 1944, an informal meeting of prominent Congressmen was held in Madras with Ammu Swaminathan presiding. The resolutions tabled here urged the Congress members to stand by the 8 August resolution of the AICC; carry on the constructive programme of the Congress; and form a volunteer corps on the lines of the Bombay Rashtriya Seva Dal. When it came to discussing the Rajaji Formula, a militant section of Congressmen repudiated it. When a war of words followed, the President left the meeting with the result that no decision was reached on *any* of the resolutions.

By this time, the Quit India Movement had almost died in the Presidency. For that matter, the political climate throughout India had been glum and sullen, what with the continued detention of Gandhiji and other Congress leaders and the adamant and unkind attitude of both Linlithgow and his successor Wavell, not to speak of the uncompromising Jinnah. The situation became no better even after the release of Gandhiji on 7 May 1944 because many other leaders were still languishing in jails.

The year 1945 began with the Secretary of State Amery's refusal to consider the release of hundreds of Congress leaders arrested in August 1942. The war had not ended. Prisoners were rotting in captivity. Suppression of all political activity continued to be the sacred policy of the Government. It was at such a critical time that one of the grandest weddings of the Presidency took place in Madras. It was the wedding of Alison, the third daughter of Governor



Hope—an occasion when the full panoply of a Governor's staff was employed. It is said as many cars went out on this occasion as would have gone to a peace time reception. The scale of celebrations of the wedding attested to the indifference of the British rulers in India to the political turbulence within and the ongoing world war without. The English Officer Dunlop I.C.S., who attended the wedding confesses to the complete insularity and imperial vain-glory that characterised the celebrations.

Hope truly shook the pagoda tree and wisely married off all his three daughters during his tenure as Governor of Madras. Though all the girls received princely presents, Alison got the costliest ones, with the Zamindars and Rajas of the erstwhile Justice Party and the multi-millionaires of Coimbatore and Karaikudi vying with one another in gifting expensive articles. Dunlop, records in his Diary: "Never was so much given by so many for so little".<sup>91</sup>

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58. *Ibid.*, 18 Aug. 1942.
59. B.S. Baliga, *op. cit*, PP. 30-34.
60. *The Hindu*, 25 Aug. 1942.
61. *The Mail*, 14 Aug. 1942.
62. *The Hindu*, 15 Aug. 1942.
63. *Ibid.*, 16 Aug. 1942.
64. *Fortnightly Report*: First Half of Sep. 1942.
65. *The Mail*, 2 Oct. 1942.
66. *The Hindu*, 6 Oct. 1942.



67. *Fortnightly Report*: Second Half of Oct. 1942.
68. Gandhiji to Linlithgow, 31 Dec. 1942; Viceroy's reply, 13 Jan. 1943; Gandhiji's second letter, 19 Jan., Viceroy's second reply, 5 Feb. *CWMG*, Vol. LXXVII, pp. 49-50; 51-53; Appendix I, pp. 445-46; Appendix II, pp. 446-48.
69. *Ibid.*, Gandhiji's letter to Linlithgow, 7 Feb. 1943, pp. 58-60.
70. *Fortnightly Report*: Second Half of Feb. 1943.
71. *Ibid.*
72. *The Hindu*, 23 Feb. 1943.
73. His letter dt. 13 Jan. 1943, *CWMG*, vol. LXXVII, p. 448.
74. Diary noting 23 Feb. 1943, *Dunlop Papers*.
75. *A Hundred Years of The Hindu*, pp. 593-94.
76. Rajmohan Gandhi, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
77. E. Sa. Visswanathan, *The Political Career of E.V. Ramaswami Naicker*, pp. 292-97.
78. Letter dt. 9 Aug. 1944, reproduced in *The Mail*, 23 Sep. 1944.
79. *Ibid.*
80. *Fortnightly Report*: Second Half of Nov. 1944.
81. *Ibid.*, Second Half of July 1944.
82. *Ibid.*, Second Half of Oct. 1944.
83. B.S. Baliga, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
84. *Fortnightly Report*: Second Half of Dec. 1944.
85. *Ibid.*, Second Half of Oct. 1944.
86. *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXII, P. F.N. 146; D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. 7, p. 23.
87. *The Mail*, 24 Aug. 1944.
88. *Ibid.*
89. *Ibid.*, 15 Aug. 1944.
90. *Fortnightly Report*: Second Half of Aug. 1944.
91. Diary noting dt. 20 January 1945, *Dunlop Papers*.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

# Last Lap of the March

### *End of a cruel war:*

With the surrender of Germany at Rheims on 7 May 1945, the devastating war in Europe came to an end. But the war against Japan continued. So the main tasks of the Government were to end the Japanese War and to carry on the British Indian administration under the existing constitution until a new permanent constitution was agreed upon. On 14 June Viceroy Wavell invited the leaders of the political parties to join his new Executive Council, which would consist entirely of Indians save the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief. To be more precise, it would be a completely Indianised Council except for the portfolio of defence. The Viceroy invited 21 members in all, from the Congress, the Muslim League, the Depressed Classes, the Sikhs and the Europeans to Simla for talks. He also announced if there was agreement on a new Executive Council, the Provincial Ministries which resigned in 1939 would resume office and there would be coalition Ministries. In pursuance of this package known as the "Wavell plan", the Members of the Congress Working Committee jailed during the Quit India Movement were freed from detention after 34 months. But the Simla talks failed thanks mainly to the "intransigence" of the Muslim League. Wavell announced that the new Council would not be formed.

The wonder of wonders took place in July 1945 when Britain went to the polls. Churchill the "World Statesman" and "cherubic war leader" who had years of glory behind him and who was in everybody's mind in 1945 was defeated. The Labour party won the elections and Clement Attlee assumed office as Premier. Amery who was one of the Ministers defeated at the polls was succeeded by Pethic Lawrence as Secretary of State for India. The triumph of the Labour party was greatly welcomed in Congress circles. But the jubilation over it had hardly subsided, when the whole country received another big blow: the horrifying news of the



explosion of atom bombs by the U.S. Air Force over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. The first atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August and the second on Nagasaki on 9 August 1945.

Fortunately for humanity, Japan surrendered on 12 August 1945 without waiting for a third atom bomb. This was a welcome turn in the war. The news of Japan's surrender was officially announced by the British Broadcasting Corporation only on the morning of 15 August. *The Hindu* was the only paper in the whole of India to carry the glad tidings on that very day. Again, this paper for the first time sent a war correspondent to Rangoon after it was recaptured from the Japanese to report in detail the ravages of the war in the Burmese capital. The report of correspondent T.G. Narayanan unveiled the mystery surrounding the Indian National Army formed by Subbhas Chandra Bose from among the Indian prisoners of war.

The INA appeared to have claimed among other things that it was completely trained and officered by Indians. Its victories were few and those who surrendered were looking haggard with little enthusiasm to fight. It looked "as if they (the INA) were dragooned to fight and the Japanese who were supposed to co-operate with them had apparently left them short of food and ammunition. Any enthusiasm the INA had for co-operating with the Japanese Army and hope of success they harboured would seem to have disappeared since the retreat from Imphal and since then the story of the INA had been one of the surrender" writes the reporter.<sup>1</sup> The INA had also a small regiment—the Rani of Jhansi Regiment—composed and officered entirely by women under the captaincy of Lakshmi, daughter of the well-known freedom fighter of the Presidency, Ammu Swaminathan.

### *A Befitting Beginning:*

The conclusion of the Second World War was closely followed by the following three announcements made by the Viceroy on 19 September regarding the new Labour Government's plan to solve the Indian question: (1) to hold the long postponed elections to the Central and Provincial legislatures by the beginning of 1946 at the latest; (2) to bring into being a constitution-making body in consultation with the newly elected members of the legislatures; and (3) to authorise the Viceroy to form a new Executive Council after the elections. Following the Viceroy's declarations, the

AICC announced its decision to contest the elections. The Congress busied itself with preparation for elections. Vallabhbhai Patel was put in charge of it.

The next important milestone in the political development of India was the announcement by the new Secretary of State, on 19 February 1946 that a three member Cabinet Mission consisting of himself, Stafford Cripps (President of the Board of Trade) and A.V. Alexander (First Lord of the Admiralty) would visit India towards the end of March to discuss with the representatives of India the framing of a constitution for free India. This was followed by a declaration by Premier Attlee on 17 March at the House of Commons that his Government would establish an Interim Government in India. Announcing that India was free to elect for independence, Attlee expressed the hope that she might elect to remain in the British Commonwealth. Referring to the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan he declared: "We are mindful of the rights of minorities and the minorities should be able to live free from fear. On the other hand, we cannot allow a minority to place a veto on the advance of a majority". These words recognising India's political unity certainly pleased the Congress. Acknowledging Britain's role in achieving this unity, *The Hindu* stated that its last act should not attempt to disrupt that unity; and that their responsibility would end with the transfer of the Government of India to Indian hands leaving it to the latter to settle their future.<sup>2</sup>

The three member-Cabinet Mission arrived in New Delhi on 24 March. As Gandhiji himself acknowledged, its purpose was to "devise the easiest and quickest method of ending British rule".<sup>3</sup> In their State Paper of 16 May the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy proposed a three tier Constitution preserving formally India's political unity and satisfying partly the Muslim League's demand for a separate political expression for Muslims.<sup>4</sup> There would be a Union of India at the top, provinces and states at the bottom, and in between, voluntary groupings of regions which would constitute a Muslim State without secession. A Constituent Assembly would be formed, with a structure safeguarding minority rights. India would have the option to remain or not in the commonwealth. Gandhiji pronounced it as "the best document the British Government could have produced in the circumstances".<sup>5</sup> But the Mission's prolonged discussions with Indian leaders proved fruitless. There was no possibility of both the major parties agreeing on a solution of the issues of Pakistan and Constitution making body. Jinnah



had pledged himself irrevocably to the partition of India which the Congress could not countenance.

It may be recalled that Jinnah had been demanding "Pakistan" since March 1940 when the Lahore resolution was passed. The Cripps' proposals of 1942 enabled a Province to secede from the Indian Union. But not so the Cabinet Mission's plan which provided for a United India. The failure of both the Congress and the Muslim League to accept it *in toto* was a most unfortunate event which changed completely the course of Indian history.\*

All attempts at reaching a Congress-League accord having failed, the delegation proposed to set up until the elected Constituent Assembly decided India's future, an Interim Government in which all portfolios would be held by Indians. But the Congress, which initially agreed to the Interim Government, later rejected it. The League which first agreed to the Cabinet Plan of 16 May subsequently reversed its decision and withdrew its support. Having withdrawn its support to the Cabinet Mission proposal, the Muslim League announced its decision to launch "Direct Action to achieve Pakistan . . . and to get rid of the present British slavery". In reality, it was nothing more than a concerted hate-propaganda of the League to foment communal passions on a massive scale throughout India.\*\*

The Congress however continued its negotiations as it did not desire a breakdown of talks. After a series of "nerve-racking" negotiations between the Viceroy and Nehru, it was decided to form an Interim Government without the Muslim League. Wavell desired to keep the seats of the League vacant but Nehru did not agree. When Nehru desired to increase the membership of the Government to 15 so as to include an Anglo-Indian also, Wavell did not agree.<sup>6</sup> Eventually, on 2 September 1946, a 14 member

\*Many constitutionalists are still of the opinion that the Congress "killed" the Cabinet Mission's plan. Chimanlal Setalvad imputes the partition of India to the "wobbling and vacillating attitude of one party" (The Congress). (A.G. Noorani India's partition—Could it have been avoided"? *The Sunday Standard*, 11 July 1971).

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad holds Jawaharlal Nehru largely (and Vallabhbhai Patel to a lesser extent) responsible for the failure of the Congress and the League to reach an agreement which eventually led to the partition of India. The Maulana deeply regrets the "greatest blunder" he had committed in his political life in proposing Nehru's name to succeed him as the Congress President in 1946. ("Partition: Azad blames Nehru, Patel", *The Hindu*, 30 Oct. 1988).

\*\* On 16 August 1946—the "Direct Action Day"—Calcutta witnessed an orgy of violence which left in its wake, five thousand dead and fifteen thousand wounded.

Interim Government was sworn in under the leadership of Nehru. This Government consisted of 6 Congress nominees,\* 3 minority representatives,\*\* and 3 Muslims.\*\*\* Two seats were left vacant for the Muslim League. Gandhiji called this day “a most memorable day in the history of India” but cautioned against any form of rejoicing as the Muslim League observed it as a day of mourning.<sup>7</sup>

Continuous efforts were made till the middle of October to bring the Muslim League into the Interim Government. Ultimately on 13 October Jinnah conveyed the League’s willingness to join it. Referring to his acceptance, Wavell observed that it was a case of objecting “to everything possible which was being accepted before accepting it”.<sup>8</sup> Jinnah nominated Jogendranath Mandal<sup>†</sup> a (Hindu) Scheduled Caste representative from East Bengal and 4 Muslims including Liaquat Ali Khan.<sup>††</sup> Jinnah kept himself out. To accommodate the Leaguers Sarat Chandra Bose, Shafaat Ahmed Khan and Syed Ali Zaheer had to be dropped.

The nominees of the Muslim League never co-operated with the Congress in working the Interim Government. On the contrary, their entry was a signal for the outbreak of communal clashes. They made every attempt to disrupt the harmony of the Interim Government in every possible way. In the first week of December, at the invitation of the British Government, Nehru, Jinnah and Wavell went to London for talks which however failed. In fact many wondered why the talks were held at all.

The Constituent Assembly elections which had been completed by 24 July 1946, had its opening session at New Delhi on 9 December 1946. It was presided over by Satchidananda Sinha. Madras was

\*Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Rajaji, Sarat Chandra Bose and Jag Jivan Ram (the Scheduled Caste representative of the Congress).

\*\*Baldev Singh, John Mathai and Coverji Hormusji Bhabha to represent respectively the Sikhs, Indian Christians and Parsis.

\*\*\*Asaf Ali (Congress Muslim); and Shafaat Ahmed Khan and Syed Ali Zaheer (Independent Muslims).

<sup>†</sup> Jinnah was subjected to much criticism for this. It was pointed out that the Muslim League being a purely communal organisation had no moral right to appoint anyone other than a Muslim and a Leaguer. The nomination of J. Mandal was just to enable the League to claim to represent the interests of the Scheduled Castes as much as the Congress did.

<sup>††</sup> Jinnah wanted the Home portfolio for the League but Patel refused to yield. Finally, Finance was given to the League although John Mathai was unhappy over losing it. Rajaji offered the portfolio of industries to Mathai, himself taking over education.



represented in the Constituent Assembly by 49 members who were elected by the Madras Legislative Assembly on 22 July. Of these, 4 were Muslims. Of the remaining 45, all but M.A. Muthiah Chetty contested on Congress tickets. Ammu Swaminathan was the only lady member. These Members represented the cream of Madras leadership.

The League boycotted the opening session of the Constituent Assembly. But the Assembly proceeded to draw up a constitution for the country's future governance. Jawaharlal Nehru delivered one of the most memorable speeches of his career on this day when he affirmed the "unbending resolve of the country to march onwards to its goal of freedom whatever the obstacles in the way and through whatever further struggles lay ahead of them".<sup>9</sup>

The Muslim League which demanded the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, declared its proceedings illegal, void and ultra-vires.<sup>10</sup> The Congress members blamed the Viceroy for having admitted the League's nominees into the Interim Government without ascertaining their co-operation both in running the Government and the Constituent Assembly. When things went beyond his control, Wavell apprised the Home Government of the most unstable political situation prevailing in the country.

On 20 February 1947 Attlee announced his Government's historic decision to quit India, settlement or no-settlement, and to "transfer power into responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948". This announcement dispelled any doubt about the intention of the British Government to leave India. Wavell was recalled and the 46 year old Louis Mountbatten,\* a most noted figure in England was appointed Viceroy of India on 24 March 1947. He was the last Viceroy of British India and the first Governor General of independent India. It thus fell to Mountbatten's lot to preside over the dismantling of the great British Empire.

### *The Presidency since 1945:*

The politics of the Presidency was murky from the mid 1945. Much of the fluster was on account of the re-entry of Rajaji into the Congress. It may be recalled that Rajaji quit the Congress on

\*Uncle of Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh and consort of Queen Elizabeth II.

15 July 1942 owing to differences with leading Congressmen including Gandhiji on the question of Pakistan. Since his exit, the leadership of Tamil Nad had definitely passed into the hands of Kamaraj Nadar who as President of the TNCC had established his position well. Though he had no claims to fortune or education, Kamaraj Nadar was noted for his sturdy common-sense. Having risen up by dint of sincerity and sacrifice, he soon became a beloved of the people of Tamil Nad. Even Ramaswami Naicker had a great admiration for this man of the masses whom he called *Pachai Tami-zhan* ("Pure Tamil").

Kamaraj Nadar wielded tremendous power and influence in the Tamil region of the Presidency during this period. He inaugurated a National Youth Federation in Madras in order to co-ordinate the activities of all youth organisations with the object of carrying on the constructive programmes of the Congress. He stood by the Quit India resolution of 8 August 1942 and was in jail for three years. The moment the Congress High Command decided to contest the elections, young Kamaraj already consumed by the burning zeal of *Swaraj*, began his strenuous election campaigns. His eloquent appeal in Tamil to huge gatherings throughout the length and breadth of Tamil Nad made a powerful impression on the masses. Kamaraj Nadar almost became an uncrowned monarch of the Tamil Nad Congress. In this changed atmosphere, the return of a towering personage like Rajaji noted for his remarkable dynamism, mental acumen and sense of dedication could not have been welcome.

To the Congress High Command which felt that the Presidency would suffer grievously on account of Rajaji's exit, his decision to come back to the party was most welcome. The High Command therefore took up Rajaji's cause. Maulana Azad who had just been freed from detention sponsored Rajaji's case. He was mightily pleased at Rajaji's decision to re-enter the Congress as he sincerely felt that "the time of separation was neither pleasant to you nor to us. . . . ."<sup>11</sup> It was strongly felt in the High Command that there was none in the south to match Rajaji's calibre. Satyamurti was dead. Prakasam's popularity was confined to the Andhra region though his sincerity and patriotism were beyond doubt. Kamaraj Nadar was the only popular leader but he was far too young.

In September 1945, Rajaji wrote to the Secretary of the Tiruchengodu Taluk Congress Committee that the President of the



AICC had been pleased to accept him as a duly enrolled member of the Congress. He applied to be re-elected to the vacancy created by his resignation in July 1942. Rajaji was the Provincial Congress Committee member elected by the Tiruchengodu Taluk Committee until his resignation in July 1942. The Secretary of the TTCC conducted the elections in accordance with Article 20 of the Congress constitution without seeking the permission of the TNCC. This exasperated Kamaraj Nadar, President of the TNCC, who maintained that the Tiruchengodu election declaring Rajaji a member of the Provincial Congress was not held at all. It was stated that the Secretary—Ramadurai—a paid officer of the Tiruchengodu *Khadi Ashram* who had received the letter from Rajaji on 4 September merely announced in the papers on 5 September that Rajaji was elected to the TNCC. The TNCC declared the procedure invalid as it was not in consonance with the rules of the AICC and the TNCC.<sup>12</sup> Thereupon the Tiruchengodu Committee appealed to the AICC to set aside the arbitrary decision of the TNC Working Committee and restore the validity of its election of Rajaji.<sup>13</sup>

In the meantime, the ban on the Congress Committees imposed during the Quit India Movement having been lifted, the Provincial Congress Committee met at Tirupparankundram (Madura) on 31 October 1945. It passed a resolution vesting its Working Committee with full powers to select candidates and arrange for the ensuing general elections. It was a democratic decision reached by a large majority after lengthy debates in which many of Rajaji's supporters participated. But Rajaji himself was not there as he was not invited by the President of the TNCC who did not recognise his election through the Tiruchengodu Taluk. The sequel was the splitting of the party into petty factions. Finding that Rajaji's claim to lead the Presidency of Madras had a strong support, Kamaraj Nadar aligned himself with C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar, M. Bhaktavatsalam and others. That they formed a hostile group was evident from their manœuvres to get rid of not only Rajaji but some of his strong supporters too.<sup>14</sup> It was a sad commentary on the extent to which personal prejudices were allowed to have precedence over principles.

As Chairman of the Central Congress Parliamentary Board, Vallabhbhai Patel was genuinely interested in seeing that the political situation in Tamil Nad was stabilized before the elections. To bring in a reconciliation between the pro and anti-Rajaji groups,

he sent Asaf Ali on behalf of the Congress Working Committee to Madras to make on the spot enquiries into the Tamil Nad affairs.

Asaf Ali received many telegrams and written representations favouring Rajaji's leadership. One of these representations was signed by a large number of members of the AICC recommending Rajaji's candidature for Presidentship of the Central Legislative Assembly.<sup>15</sup> In his report to the Congress Working Committee, Asaf Ali emphasised the great support that Rajaji enjoyed. On the strength of that report Patel formed the Tamil Nad Congress Parliament Election Board under the lead of Kamaraj Nadar to select candidates for the elections. The other members of the Board were C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar, Ramaswamy Reddy, T.S. Avinashilingam Chetty, Rukmani Lakshmipati, Subbaiah, Muniswamy Pillai and Annamalai Pillai. Rajaji's men did find a place but they were in a minority. The Board had five of Kamaraj's and three of Rajaji's men. They had to select candidates from the Tamil districts subject to the approval of the Central Board.

Although apparently everything was smooth, Patel could sense that the TNCC was very touchy about outside interference. The Committee believed in the principle of self-determination or unfettered autonomy. Even during Asaf Ali's stay in Madras, the Congressmen threatened indiscipline and refused to listen to advice given by him. Kamaraj Nadar's telegram sent after Asaf Ali's departure exasperated Patel for it said that the Congress High Command should take no decision regarding Tamil Nad without consulting his Working Committee. There was "a veiled threat of indiscipline if not revolt" in Kamaraj's telegram to Patel which the latter dismissed as "wholly unexpected and uncalled for".<sup>16</sup> Muthuranga Mudaliar also sent a telegram of self-same tenor interpreting the High Command's anxiety to reinstate Rajaji as an undue interference in provincial politics and an act of partiality to Rajaji. Referring to both the telegrams, Patel wrote: "if you are all acting under a terrible fear-complex, Tamil Nad will have a very bad future".<sup>17</sup> In his elaborate letter to Asaf Ali, Muthuranga Mudaliar went so far as to insinuate that the reasons which actuated the Working Committee to expel the Communists held good with greater force in the case of Rajaji. In conclusion he wrote: "I hope that Tamil Nad alone will not be treated as the Cindrella of the Congress and made to do things that are unconstitutional and undemocratic. It will make the Tamil Nad workers, who are the backbone of the Congress Movement and who have made enormous



sacrifice in the cause of freedom very sore and disgusted".<sup>18</sup>

There were reports alleging that the press baron Ramnath Goenka was financing the movement against Rajaji.<sup>19</sup>

Kamaraj Nadar would happily pack off Rajaji to the Central Assembly.<sup>20</sup> Patel also felt that it would be wiser for Rajaji to do so as he sensed many difficulties in his way to Provincial leadership. His entry into the Central Assembly would clear the way for his future.<sup>21</sup> But Rajaji did not want it. He would enter only provincial politics and expressed his desire to contest the elections from the University constituency. He was also selected by the Board as a contestant. These internal squabbles were however set aside by both the parties while canvassing for Congress victory. They worked unitedly for the Congress win which was very certain as there was no other major party in the Presidency to compete with it. The Justice Party which had been converted into the *Dravida Kazhagam* did not participate in the elections.

It would be unwise to expect that Rajaji would receive a fair and friendly treatment from the TNCC whose President had only three years earlier served on the "Father of the Tamil Nad Congress" a show cause notice. In Rajaji, Kamaraj Nadar "detected the haughtiness of caste and learning. He could not attach his wagon to the engine that was C.R., one that dazzled and kept moving but seemed to follow hazardous and baffling routes; and Rajaji did not fancy suppressing himself in order to win and retain Kamaraj's loyalty. It was hard for them to evolve a partnership of shared influence".<sup>22</sup> So Kamaraj Nadar and his group looked upon Rajaji's return with bitterness and suspicion. His return was given the interpretation that in the opinion of the Congress High Command, the Presidency would be leaderless without Rajaji. The Tamil Nad Congress was not prepared to accept such a contention. It refused to concede that the High Command's backing of Rajaji was purely in the interest of the Province.

Rajaji's performance as the Premier of Madras from 1937-39 and his subsequent achievements at the all-India level till he left the Congress, were by any standard brilliant. The Presidency should have been proud of his services which even his worst detractors would not dispute. No doubt his stand on Pakistan and his opposition to the Quit India Resolution alienated him from even Gandhiji. His speeches since his re-entry into the Congress also left much to be desired. He often justified his attitude towards the Congress since April 1942. Such talks did not inspire confidence

in the minds of the rank and file of the Congressmen in the Presidency except people close to him. There were complaints that he sedulously spread the view that the High Command was behind him and was quoting the letters of Patel or Maulana Azad or even Gandhiji to Congress workers.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless the fact remained that even during those critical moments when Rajaji was out of the Congress, Gandhiji had the courage to admire the frankness and boldness with which Rajaji publicly avowed the difference. Gandhiji, Patel and Azad were magnanimous enough to forget the past and consider Rajaji's case purely on the basis of merit by giving credence to his past sacrifices, political wisdom, loyalty, integrity and ability. But not so the members of the Tamil Nad Congress. They were against his coming back on technical grounds. At the Ariyalur conference convened by those Congressmen who were released three years after they were incarcerated for the Quit India Movement, 670 to 4 had demanded the denial of re-entry into the Congress of those who had kept out of the Quit India Movement. The Provincial Congress was concerned only with Rajaji's anti-Congress activities of the preceding three years. They refused to accept that these deeds could not be a permanent bar to his return to Congress since he promised to abide by the discipline and decisions of the Congress in future. The fact that Rajaji was taken as a representative of the Congress at the Simla Viceregal talks along with others was conveniently ignored.<sup>24</sup>

The situation took a different turn when suddenly Kamaraj Nadar resigned his Presidentship of the Tamil Nad Congress Parliamentary Board on 12 February 1946.<sup>25</sup> The provocation for this act was an article of Gandhiji in the *Harijan* which had reference to the Tamil Nad Congress. His article captioned "Curious" had reference to a "clique" in the official Congress in Madras against Rajaji. While acknowledging the right of the Congressmen in the south to act as they deemed best, Gandhiji said, "I would be less than loyal to the organisation, if I did not warn them against losing the valuable services which no one can shoulder as Rajaji can at the present moment".

The article was written after Gandhiji's visit to Madras in January 1946 to participate in the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Hindi Prachar Sabha. Gandhiji repudiated the strong rumour in the Andhra region that he had gone to Madras to make Rajaji the Premier. If that was his intention, he said, he could have done it



from where he was. He had no interest in elections and offices. However, since he was challenged, Gandhiji concluded the article with this eloquent testimony to Rajaji: “. . . . Rajaji was by far the best man for the purpose in the Southern Presidency and, if I had the disposal in my hands, I would call Rajaji to office . . . . But the disposal was with the Provincial Congress Committee and finally with the Working Committee. My opinion was only that of an individual, to be taken for what it was worth”.\*<sup>26</sup>

The article came as a “shock” to Kamaraj Nadar who was the official head of the TNCC. He immediately quit the Parliamentary Board. T.S. Avinashilingam Chetty, C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar, O.P. Ramaswamy Reddy and Rukmani Lakshmipati also decided to quit but Kamaraj persuaded them to remain as the election work had to go on undisturbed. Both Kamaraj Nadar and T. Prakasam aired their indignant voice in the Press also.<sup>27</sup> It was after this that Kamaraj Nadar wired to Patel informing him of his withdrawal from the Board. Patel was taken aback as Kamaraj had taken this drastic step without consulting him. He was certain that Kamaraj’s act would “lead to more public controversy and will not help the Province just on the eve of elections”.<sup>28</sup> However, since Kamaraj continued to be the head of the Provincial Congress Committee with his colleagues working as advised by him, Patel was inclined to dismiss his resignation from the Parliamentary Board as “a mere show”.<sup>29</sup> When Gandhiji’s attention was invited to the statements in the Press, he confessed to the correspondent of *The Hindu* that he did not like them because he never referred to any single person in his article.<sup>30</sup> Lots of telegrams and letters were sent to Gandhiji condemning him for his “defence” of Rajaji. Some had threatened to fast if Gandhiji did not withdraw the word “clique”. Reprehending such use of fasts Gandhiji said in his statement to the Press: “No one should give up opinion honestly held even if the whole world were against him. I, therefore, advise against such fasts”.<sup>31</sup>

The controversy over his re-entry into the Congress snowballed and Rajaji was thoroughly disgusted. The noise became so unbearable and the calumniations against him so strong that Rajaji had no longer the strength to bear them. He therefore left the political arena. Rajaji was much offended by the charge that he was

\*This article was the result of a letter handed over to Gandhiji on his return journey from Palani reviling Rajaji and N. Gopalaswamy Iyengar (Chairman of the Jubilee Celebrations of the Hindi Prachar Sabha).

scheming to be the Premier of Madras which was far from truth.<sup>32</sup> He wrote to Gandhiji: "I must yield to the longing of my heart not to be misunderstood. Why should I be thought of seeking "power" when it is not the case at all? I must prove it, although the proof is one that leaves no good behind but the mere proof".<sup>33</sup> Since the urgent and crucial job of selection of candidates for the election was over, Rajaji chose to leave the scene. This was the third time that Rajaji left the political arena owing to difference of opinion. The other two occasions were in 1923 and 1936.\*

Rajaji's withdrawal left everybody in suspense. Patel was justifiably angry as he worked very hard to "refurbish" the image of Rajaji. He felt most keenly that Rajaji was "unfair and unjust". "How could anybody support you" he wrote to Rajaji "if you act like this? You do not even consult us, but that has always been your way of life. I cannot understand you".<sup>34</sup> Rajaji's withdrawal from the University constituency was finally accepted by Patel on 27 February.<sup>35</sup>

Rajaji's recommendation of B. Sambamurti as his substitute irritated Patel more. It was not appreciated by the High Command either. The proposal had to come from the Province. Even if the Province did so, it would be difficult for the Central Board to accept Sambamurti who had already made a public statement that he did not desire to stand for elections.<sup>36</sup>

After retiring from political life for the third time in 1946, Rajaji interested himself in Harijan welfare activities. He concentrated chiefly on temple-entry for Harijans. By June 1947, almost all the famous temples in the South except those in Cochin were thrown open to Harijans. The places worth mentioning were the temples in Madura, Tinnevely, Chidambaram, Srirangam, Palani, Triplicane,

\*During the days of non-co-operation and after, as a typical Gandhian, Rajaji cried the slogan of "No-entry into councils". When the Swarajya party was formed advocating Council-entry, he cut himself away devoting his time to *khadar* work and prohibition campaigns. He remained in Tiruchengodu where he established an *ashram* on a land of 3½ acres offered by the Zamindar of Puduppalayam (near Tiruchengodu). This *ashram* became a model reconstruction work centre. He also edited the journal *Vimochanam* ("Salvation").

Towards the close of 1936, for the second time Rajaji announced his decision retire from Congress. The occasion was when his bosom friend and veteran Congressman T.S.S. Rajan violated the party discipline and set up a candidate at his own free will to contest the elections for the chairmanship of the Trichinopoly Municipal Council. The officially set-up candidate was defeated. The behaviour of his friend drove Rajaji to withdraw from political activities.



Tirupati, Conjeevaram, Guruvayoor and Rameswaram.<sup>37</sup> The last one was opened on 30 June 1947. P. Sivashanmugam Pillai, the Harijan Speaker of the Madras Legislative Assembly went to these temples with other Harijan and non-Harijan devotees.<sup>38</sup> In the opening of the Tirupati temple to Harijans in June 1947, the then Premier of Madras O.P. Ramaswamy Reddy also participated.

*Landslide Victory for Congress:*

Despite the ill-feelings generated by the re-entry of Rajaji, both factions of the Provincial Congress worked unitedly for the success of the Congress in the elections. The elections were held in April 1946. Of the 215 constituencies, in 94 there was no contest at all. Madras was the only Presidency where such a large number of candidates was returned unopposed. Of these 94, 63 were from Tamil Nad region. The following was the position of the Legislative Assembly after the elections in 1946:

Congress	:	163
Muslim League	:	28
Communists	:	2
Europeans	:	7
Independents	:	6
Independent Party	:	7
Vacant seats	:	2
<hr/>		
Total	:	215
<hr/>		

Though the Congress won an astounding victory in the Presidency bagging as many as 163 seats, there was no leader to guide its destiny. It was feared that the reputation of the Congress in the Presidency was in jeopardy. Patel was greatly worried that there was no capable Congress personality in the Presidency who could assert his will and put the Congress organisation on the right path.<sup>39</sup> When Kamaraj Nadar, Prakasam and Madhava Menon heads of the Tamil Nad, Andhra and Kerala Congress respectively sought the advice of the High Command, the latter suggested Rajaji, stating at the same time its opinion was not binding. By 148 votes to 38, the members of the Madras Congress Legislature party rejected the High Command's recommendation. This was followed by a contest between Prakasam and Muthuranga Mudaliar, the

latter backed by Kamaraj Nadar. The Telugu leader won by 82 votes to 69, "the rest mostly C.R. Supporters, remaining neutral".<sup>40</sup>

Prakasam formed the Ministry on 30 April 1946. The Governor's rule established in 1939 after the resignation of the Rajaji Ministry, ended. After seven years, once again the Congress came to power. Its main Opposition was provided by the Muslim League. The Congress formed a thirteen-member Cabinet with Prakasam as Premier. The distribution of their portfolios was as follows: Prakasam (Public, Home, Food, Police, Finance and Planning); V.V. Giri (Industries, Labour, Electricity and Co-operation); Rukmani Lakshmipati (Public Health and Medicine); K. Bhashyam (Law, Courts, Registration and Prison); K. Koti Reddy (H.R.E., Excise and Debt Relief); Daniel Thomas (Local Administration); K.R. Karanth (Land Revenue and Commercial Taxes); M. Bhaktavatsalam (Public Works, Irrigation and High Ways); T.S. Avinashilingam (Education); V. Kurmayya (Information, Broadcasting and Harijan uplift); P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja (Agriculture, Trade and Communications); B. Veeraswamy (Forest, Cinchona, Fisheries and Village Industries); and R. Raghava Menon (Transport, Housing etc.). The Speaker was J. Sivashanmugam Pillai, a Harijan. Deputy Speaker was Ammanna Raja from Andhra. The President of the Council was R.P. Ramakrishna Raju and Vice President, K. Venkataswamy Naidu.

In forming the Ministry, the Madras Congress Assembly party "deliberately disregarded" the advice of the High Command. The latter therefore decided at least for the nonce, to non-co-operate with the Madras Congress Legislature Party.<sup>41</sup>

With Prakasam as Premier, there was a lot of speculation as to how long his Ministry would last. The Ministry had a most difficult task to face what with the after effects of the Second World War and consequent high prices, hoarding and black-marketing, the movement of the *Dravida Kazhagam* directed against the Brahmans and the menacing activities of the Communists. The day prior to the installation of Archibald Nye\* as the new Governor of Madras on 26 February 1946, there was a labour strike on a large scale. All the shops were closed and none of the Transport Services worked. Even the workers of the Connemara Hotel and Spencers

\*During the period between the departure of Arthus Hope and the arrival of Archibald Nye, Henry Knight, a member of the ICS acted as Interim Governor of Madras.



struck work. There was trouble when anti-social elements indulged in stone-throwing and the armed police resorted to lathi charge. The Governor's Secretariat was the worst affected on this occasion. Its officers were denied entry to the press where copies of the oath for the next day's swearing-in-ceremony of the Governor had to be printed. Dunlop notes in his diary that the Mount Road was "littered with stones and brickbats. It looked more like a war scene of street fighting than the peaceful warm Madras I know". Dunlop charged the "Labour politicians" with having contributed to this state of indiscipline.<sup>42</sup>

Life was far from being comfortable in the Presidency as well as in India. There had been waves of strikes the biggest being that organised by the lower grade workers of the All-India Posts and Telegraphs in August 1946. The Unions ran this with a good measure of success. Then there was the agitation organised by the workers of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills who were on strike for two months. The Communists were behind it. Adjudication having finally settled the matter, the Mill reopened by the beginning of August 1946.<sup>43</sup>

Even before the results of the elections were out, the Communists were at their game. Anticipating the success of the Congress, they tricked to capture labour so as to bring discredit to the Congress. Soon after the formation of the Ministry, they demanded nationalisation of all industries. They opened a "Parliamentary office" in Madras to collect statistics about the grievances of the workers and organised a general strike in the South Indian Railway in September 1946. This was the second major strike on the South Indian Railway. The police brutalities to quell it excelled those employed in the first strike of June-July 1928.<sup>44</sup> When this strike was aborted, the Communists accused the Congress Government of being capitalistic.

The Communists tormented the Government in all possible ways. They formed Labour Unions in the city and the mofussil areas; set up village food committees; fomented strikes in mills, factories, dockyards and essential services; incited agricultural labourers against their landlords; in fine anarchy was let loose by them compelling the Government to take stringent measures to preserve public peace and safeguard public interests.<sup>45</sup> The Government issued the Madras Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance, the very first Ordinance of the Prakasam Ministry, early in 1947. This was followed by the Maintenance of Public Order Act (1947)

which meant to deal with subversive activities. It provided for preventive detention; imposition of collective fines and censorship; control of meetings, processions, camps, drills and parades; requisitioning of property; and control of essential services.<sup>46</sup> Under this Act, many active Communist agitators were detained. But they were released when they gave an undertaking to abstain from subversive activities. While in detention they were treated well. They were even released on parole to attend on their sick relatives, to perform obligatory ceremonies etc.

The Prakasam Ministry was far from being popular. It somehow managed to handle without much difficulty, the economic distress produced by the second World War and the communal unrest created by the Dravida Kazhagam of E.V. Ramaswami Naicker. But it had a very tough task in tackling the political upheavals created by the Communists. These apart, the policy pursued by his Ministry in matters like the textile mills, Zamindari Bill, Agricultural Income Tax and Provincial Road Transport earned it condemnation from many quarters. It was Prakasam's policy in respect of textile mills that came under severest criticism. There were acute differences of opinion over this issue not only between the Congress party as a whole and the general public but between the Ministry and some of the rank and file in the party. In fact there was reason to believe that the Ministers themselves were not agreed on the policy that the Premier put forward officially.<sup>47</sup>

A Gandhian to the core, Prakasam announced while implementing the *khadar* promotion scheme that no new textile mills would be started in the Presidency of Madras. Gandhiji had taken the assurance from the Congress Ministries before giving his final approval for the *Khadar Scheme* that no more textile mills would be erected. Gandhiji warned the Ministries that their *Khadar* scheme would be an eye-wash if while promoting *Khadar* they went on planting fresh textile mills in the Provinces.<sup>48</sup> Gandhiji was therefore very happy with the policy pursued by T. Prakasam. Prakasam undertook to carry out big schemes in regard to *Khadar*, prohibition, and eradication of untouchability. Gandhiji paid rich tributes to Prakasam particularly for his textile policy which would "benefit not only Madras but the whole Indian community".<sup>49</sup>

Added to the administrative problems, were the "shifts and stresses" within the party. The Oppositionists in the party attributed the Ministry's unpopularity to its failure to consult their views on important matters. Instead of meeting the challenge, Prakasam



abused them and attributed motives to all who criticised his administration. He characterised as “malicious propaganda” even the criticism emanating from men of good will about some of his policies and measures. The opposition looked to the High Command although it had no use for its advice till then.<sup>50</sup> J.B. Kripalani, President of the Indian National Congress sent the veteran Congress leader Sankarrao Deo to settle amicably the dispute over the leadership of the Madras Congress Legislature Party. But it proved unavailing as the Prakasam Ministry was toppled.

### *Fall of the Prakasam Ministry:*

From the beginning of February 1947, there was talk about the move within the Congress Party to table a no-confidence motion in the Ministry. But Prakasam and his colleagues treated it lightly. They counted on mass backing. They were wrong as they had established no ties with local opinion. Indeed they seriously erred in ignoring public opinion. Such an experienced politician and administrator as Prakasam failed to realise that criticism of his administration from different quarters reflected public opinion and that the ultimate sanction behind any form of popular government was public opinion. He and his colleagues had not been “fully alive to the trends of public opinion in the province on at least some issues of great social and economic import. . . . .”<sup>51</sup>

Counting on mass sympathy which they did not really enjoy, the Ministers addressed a series of public meetings in Madras and in the districts to side-track the main issue. *The Hindu* called it the “method of a petti fogging attorney with a weak case”.<sup>52</sup> Quoting from the *New Statesman* that “A ‘good party’ is at least as important to the Government as a ‘good press’”, the same paper added that “when a Government ceases to have either (and we are afraid that is what Mr. Prakasam confesses to and complains of) the remedy lies in its own hands”.<sup>53</sup>

On 28 February 1947, the much talked of motion of no-confidence was brought before a special meeting of the party but was ruled out of order by Prakasam. The sponsors of the motion immediately voted O.P. Ramaswamy Reddy, Deputy leader of the party to the Chair and passed the no-confidence motion and also another one electing Ramaswamy Reddy as the leader of the party.<sup>54</sup> Shankarrao Deo who was present at both meetings submitted his report on the situation in the Presidency to the Congress Parliamentary Sub-

Committee. Then Kripalani himself came to Madras on a mission of effecting a *rapprochement* between conflicting groups.

The Ministry headed by Prakasam resigned on 14 March 1947 after a very short tenure of eleven months and the new Ministry assumed office on 23 March 1947. Prakasam and his colleagues listened to the advice of the President of the National Congress and abided by the verdict of the majority of their party. Kripalani was happy to that extent though he could not bring about a reconciliation among Congressmen who were divided in the Madras Legislative Assembly. He however stated that he could not understand what the quarrel was about. "All sides swear by the Congress policy and Congress programme. . . . I know they are all Congressmen but I do not know and I have not been able to find out what their differences are about . . . . . It baffles me", he said.<sup>55</sup>

It would be of interest to know in this context, that Khasa Subba Rao, a journalist of high repute accused Rajaji of having had a hand in replacing Prakasam by Ramaswamy Reddy. In a leader in his journal *Swarajya*, there was an insinuation that Rajaji being so desirous of the Premiership of Madras, intrigued against Prakasam. Evidently, Khasa's affection for Prakasam had "misled" him. But it hurt Rajaji so much that he wrote ". . . . . God knows my mind. Indeed you did me great wrong". Moved by this, Khasa regretted his act and apologised to Rajaji. In less than a decade after this unpleasant incident, Khasa became a faithful ally and confidante of Rajaji.<sup>56</sup>

### *India awakes to Freedom:*

Events marched rapidly in the national arena after the arrival of Mountbatten. The last Viceroy lost no time in getting down to business. There were clear indications that he would be content to be the constitutional head of the Government. The stage was thus "set for a happy ending of the British rule in India".<sup>57</sup> On his initiative, a meeting of Gandhiji and Jinnah took place on 6 May 1947. But Gandhiji's sincere attempts to placate Jinnah failed. The "rigid, arid and irrevocable" Jinnah refused to give up his cry for Pakistan. Gandhiji importuned the wrong Indian when he said: "You can cut me in two, but don't cut India in two".<sup>58</sup> Still not losing hope, Gandhiji called upon Britain to implement the Cabinet Mission's proposals of 16 May 1946 and quit.<sup>59</sup> But his views were not to prevail.



Ultimately on 3 June both the Congress and the Muslim League told Mountbatten that they were in agreement with the proposals of the British Government to partition India. 15 August 1947 was fixed for the ushering in of the two Dominions of India and Pakistan. The Indian Independence Bill presented in the British Parliament on 4 July stated: "The two independent Dominions known as India and Pakistan will come into existence on 15 August 1947". On 18 July the Royal Assent was given to the Indian Independence Bill.

On 14-15 August, "at the stroke of the midnight hour", when the rest of the world slept, India awoke to "life and freedom".<sup>60</sup> The vast sub-continent which in terms of space is considered to be less than equal (after the loss of territory to Pakistan) to the whole of Europe minus Russia, entered the comity of free nations—an event which marked the beginning of the end of colonialism in the world.

The transfer of power was smooth notwithstanding the unprecedented communal riots following partition in the north and east of the country. To cite an instance, independent India treated the British officers remarkably well with no trace of bitterness from the past. The contracts of these officers in India were terminated after granting them adequate compensation. However, after the transfer of power, those who wished to continue their service under free India were permitted to do so on their existing terms as to the scales of pay, leave, pensionary rights and safeguards in matters of discipline. The Madras Provincial (Congress) Government followed suit enabling members of the Secretary of State's Services who opted to join the Provincial Services to do so. Three months before independence, Governor Nye wrote to the Premier of Madras touching on this matter and requested him to agree to this issue of fundamental importance.<sup>61</sup>

The Congress Ministry under the Premiership of Ramaswamy Reddy was already in office in the Presidency when the momentous transfer of power took place on 14-15 August 1947 and for two decades thereafter, the Congress reigned supreme.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

# Epilogue

I have made every endeavour in the preceding six hundred odd pages to document and substantiate the claim that the Presidency of Madras had made a solid and significant contribution to the epic war of Indian Independence.

The first shot at British suzerainty over India was attempted in the distant unpretentious town of Panchalankurichi in the Tinnevely district of the Madras Presidency. From this first and firm step of defiance against imperial aggrandizement taken by Kattabomman at the cost of his own life to the day when the Provincial Congress entered the national arena to join the mainstream of the spectacular march to freedom, the Presidency had played a commendable role. The rhythm of its march was no doubt uneven: sometimes it was vigorous; sometimes halting; but never at an *impasse*. In other words, the torch of freedom was always kept burning by the marchers.

The patriots of the Presidency might have questioned the feasibility of certain aspects of the innovative struggle adumbrated by the Father of the Nation. But they were not a whit behind their counterparts in other Provinces in readily responding to the clarion call of the Mahatma to join the resolute march along the road to independence. Each Movement launched by Gandhiji starting from the Rowlatt Satyagraha, proved to be more effective and more powerful than the previous one. The ranks of the satyagrahis from the Presidency also increased progressively from Movement to Movement until eventually all strata of society were drawn into the vortex of the struggle which found its denouement in 1942 in the cryptic slogan "Quit India". All the Movements, whatever the terminologies used to describe them, denoted one fundamental factor: the "Great Refusal" of the country to co-operate with an autocratic Government which denied it its due. They were also unique: for the non-co-operators had demonstrated even at the height of these Movements that the hatred of British rule did not mean hatred of British people.

It was seen that in their war of liberation the Nationalists of the



south had to contend not only with the British regime but also with the formidable Non-Brahman Movement. The Justice Party managed to command adequate popularity and support to gain power under the diarchical dispensation. Of course, it came to power once on its own strength and on other occasions power came to it thanks to the Congress' ban on council entry and office acceptance. It was a most unfortunate aspect in the annals of the Presidency's struggle for freedom because the Justice party was avowedly pro-British. But, the support which this party managed to muster from the Presidency was no reflection on the relative strength of the National Congress in the Presidency. This was amply illustrated by the fact that whenever the Congress contested the elections—whether to the Provincial Council or to the Central Assembly—the Presidency overwhelmingly elected it to power.

For three decades since 1937 (save an interregnum of less than seven years from 1939 to 46), the Congress was repeatedly voted to power by astounding majorities twice before and thrice after Independence. In 1967, this prestigious and powerful organisation which fought for freedom for decades, was ousted from position in Madras—its stronghold—by a very young party, the *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* ("Dravidian Progressive Association"). Despite its national stature, the Congress in Tamil Nadu is yet to retrieve the glory and the political territory it lost to regional parties.

The DMK which won the elections was a splinter group of the DK which in turn was a breakaway group of the former Justice Party. Under its popular leader Annadurai, the finest orator that Tamil Nadu has produced, the DMK won the elections in 1967 with a stunning majority. After Annadurai's death in February 1969 Karunanidhi became the leader of the DMK and the Chief Minister after a brief war of succession.

The growth of the DMK which made its *debut* in the 1957 elections, had been staggering: within a decade thereafter, it had given a mighty blow to a party which was nearly a century old. From a "communal mass movement", the DMK had, within two decades of its birth, shaped itself into a "potent political party". Four years before it came to power, the DMK also gave up its cry for a separate "Democratic Socialist Dravidanad". Rather it was forced to do so by the sixteenth amendment to the Constitution in 1963 following the Sino-Indian War. This Amendment Act sought to curb the secessionist tendencies of the political parties. Apart from empowering the States to punish those indulging in secessionist

propaganda, the sixteenth amendment also made it obligatory on all legislators to swear or affirm allegiance to India's integrity.

The reasons for the ignominious defeat of the Congress in 1967 were not far to seek. No doubt high prices, shortage of food and other essential commodities caused by severe drought, high taxation and corruption at different levels did contribute to its downfall. But the most significant factor responsible for its rout was the language policy of the Congress at the centre. The Congress whose *lingua franca* was English since its birth, began to sponsor Hindi as an official as well as national language. After independence, the partiality for Hindi in northern India progressively reached a fanatical crescendo which spontaneously alienated the people of Tamil Nadu. This narrow linguistic outlook which had imperceptibly crept into the Congress constituted the major cause for the deviation of the Presidency from the national mainstream. Alas! Contrary to the dreams of seers like Tagore and Bharati, the country was broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls. The erstwhile composite Madras Presidency was no more. Out of it emerged the four linguistic States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala.

"Non-imposition of Hindi" constituted the main plank of the election Manifesto of the DMK in 1967. Annadurai re-iterated in all his speeches that one half of the country could not impose its language on the other half. There were anti-Hindi demonstrations throughout Tamil Nadu from 1965. There was an epidemic of lawlessness, which left in its wake unalterable ruins. There reigned a spirit of defiance and indiscipline everywhere. The Opposition parties which formed into a United Front, with DMK as the major partner, highlighted only these. The achievements of the Congress in many spheres, particularly on the agricultural front and the strong industrial foundation laid by it in the post-Independence era, were deliberately disregarded. *The Hindu* which had by now become an independent non-party newspaper urged the electorate through its election-eve leaders to judge fairly the record of the Congress and vote it to power in the national interest. The electorate decided differently.

The post-Congress era in Tamil Nadu witnessed great vicissitudes in popular support to political parties. The electorate continued to place immense faith in the DMK which was once again swept to power in 1971 under Karunanidhi's leadership. In this election, even Kamaraj, that great son of Tamil Nadu, who rescued the nation from a great crisis following the death of Lal Bahadur Sastri



by managing the election of a new leader smoothly, was trounced. He suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of an unknown student belonging to the DMK.

With the dismissal of the DMK Ministry in 1976, President's rule was imposed on Tamil Nadu for a year. In 1977, the *Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* ("Anna Dravidian Progressive Association") headed by the matinee idol and philanthropist M.G. Ramachandran who was literally worshipped by the Tamil masses was voted to power. The ADMK which thereafter styled itself *All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* was again a splinter group of the DMK. Unlike the previous splinters of the Justice Party, there were no major ideological differences between the DMK and the AIADMK. The qualifier "*All India*" in the nomenclature of the latter party was at best a ploy to avoid being banned as a regional party when the threat of such a possibility was very much in the air. The AIADMK never entertained any serious ambition at the national level. Though his Ministry was also dismissed by the Centre in 1980, the celluloid hero had no difficulty in winning back his position by an astounding majority in the very next elections. His party had tremendous popular support at the grass root level.

However, Tamil Nadu has not made much headway politically or economically for some years now, in comparison with certain other States. Tamil Nadu does not certainly lack competent leaders who will place the interests of the state and the nation above all parochial personal considerations. It is to such leaders of vision, calibre and unimpeachable character that the Tamils *should* look for a prosperous to-morrow. It is my earnest hope that Tamil Nadu will, ere long, shed the complacency and will "arise" and "awake" to manfully confront the challenging tasks before it. After all, it is also the sacred and bounden duty of a citizen in a democratic set-up to return with intelligent discrimination only those politicians who are seriously committed to the implementation of their own manifesto and election pledges.

The men who will be at the helm of affairs to-morrow would do well to take cognizance of the words uttered some 50 years ago by that Writer of International repute Walter Lippmann: "Those in high places are more than the Administrators of Government Bureaux. They are more than the writers of laws. They are the custodians of a Nation's ideals, of the beliefs it cherishes, of its permanent hopes, of the faith which makes a nation out of a mere aggregation of individuals. . . . ."





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